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Sneak Preview of John Toland's hilarious—

WATER CURE —coming in the great

December issue of—**FANTASTIC**

. . . The girl, her name was Zev, had always been a soft touch for birds with broken wings and hungry cats, so she hesitated. The mother instinct in her was touched by Fredrick's agonized look.

She said, "You *are* real." Then she adopted a cooing tone. "And you're as cold as a. . . ." She searched for the mot juste.

"Icicle," chattered the helpful Fredrick.

"As a icicle. You poor thing." She reached behind the rock and pulled out a fur stole which she draped around Fredrick's neck. "You can't blame a girl for doubting. . . ." She stopped and gulped. "You didn't really—"

Fredrick sighed as he laid the stole on the rock. "Here goes." He put his foot in the water. "Ohhhh! It's cold!" Then a calm, detached expression came on his face. He reminded Zev of one of Rubens' older cherubs. He took a bold step into the Hudson River.

"You're . . . you're standing on something," stammered Zev.

"Certainly." He took a few more steps. "On water."

BE SURE TO READ THIS MASTERPIECE OF ROWDY FUN IN THE DECEMBER FANTASTIC

—ON THE NEWSSTANDS SEPTEMBER 10TH.

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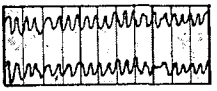
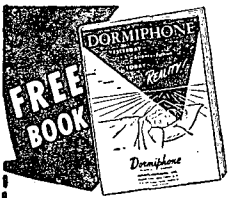


Brain in relaxation.

Brain while person sleeps.



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CONTENTS

COSMIC APPETITE
By Milton Lesser..... 6

NITE FILE
By Stan Baer..... 21

THE OUTLAWS
By Lee Priestley..... 37

THE MURDER-CON
By Jerome Bixby..... 52

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO
By Michael Fischer..... 93

THE YELLOW NEEDLE
By Gerald Vance..... 98

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Cosmic Appetite

BY MILTON LESSER

This Thing that somehow got onto the space ship—it no doubt would have been of great interest to Science. But it wouldn't cooperate. It had a one-track mind and a single question: "What's on the menu, mates?"

WHEN the eggshell cracked open, out plopped a formless little blob the size of a clenched fist.

"Look at that, will you?" said the first soldier.

"Some souvenir," his companion grinned.

"Think we ought to tell the C. O.?"

"Are you kidding? They won't let us bring souvenirs back to Earth."

"Hey, it's eating something!"

"That's my camera, stupid."

"Where?"

"I'm telling you, the damned thing ate my camera."

"Nothing eats cameras!"

"Yeah? That camera cost me forty bucks."

The formless blob grew, eating the eggshell from which it had emerged. It was the size of a basketball now.

"You're nuts."

"I'm going to cut it open and get back my camera." The second soldier got a razor blade from the medicine cabinet and approached the formless blob.

The blob ate the razor blade.

"Hey, we'll make a fortune with that thing back on Earth."

"It's still growing."

"Maybe we better tell the C. O. after all."

"And get confined to quarters or something? Nuts."

The blob ate the table top and fell to the floor, still growing.

Major Robert Merton

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The hideous thing moved relentlessly forward.

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poked a red face into the control cabin and said, "Two of my men are missing."

Ed Crawley grinned. "They can't get very far aboard a spaceship, major."

"It isn't funny, young man. We fell out the men twenty minutes ago for roll call. Two were missing."

Ed Crawley winked at Sam Harris, his co-pilot. The wink said a lot of things but said, mostly, it was a pain in the neck ferrying a couple of hundred G.I.s to the asteroids and back for maneuvers. Especially when their commanding officer was a very unimaginative and arrogant brass hat who seemed to regret that the Army didn't own spaceships of its own or at least spaceship pilots.

"Did you check their quarters?" Ed Crawley asked.

"Well, no." The major's face became redder.

"If I were you, I would," Sam Harris said, returning Crawley's wink.

"Well, that's what I came to see you boys about."

"What's that?"

"We tried to get in there."

"Where?"

"Their quarters. We couldn't."

"Locked?" asked Ed Crawley.

The major shrugged. "I unlocked the door all right, but it wouldn't open."

"Put her on automatic," Crawley told Harris. "We'll go take a look."

"Are we on schedule, boys?" demanded Major Merton.

Crawley, who was only twenty eight but had logged more milmiles of spacetime than any living pilot, flinched. For the major, everyone aboard ship was "boys"—except Major Robert Merton.

"Yeah," Crawley said. "Ten million miles sunside of the Martian orbit. We should hit Earth day after tomorrow."

"Let's go look at this unlocked door that won't open," Sam Harris said, and led the way from the control cabin.

The major drew a flock of salutes from soldiers lounging in the companionway and on the observation deck, then followed Crawley and Harris down a long corridor toward the sleeping quarters of his men.

"It's room seven," he said.

They reached the door, where Crawley inserted his master key in the lock. "Unlocked," he said, and pushed. The door didn't budge.

"What's the trouble?" Harris asked.

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Crawley scratched his head. "Something's pushing from the other side."

"I told you," Major Merton said. "Thompson, are you in there? McCoombs? This is Major Merton."

There was no answer.

Crawley frowned at Harris, then turned to the major. "All these cabins have ceiling escape hatches," he said. "I'll try that."

He went to a wall locker in the corridor, opening it. Harris helped him into the massive spacesuit, lifting the glassite helmet over his head and fastening it to the neck plate. "O.K., Ed?"

Crawley's voice came clear and metallic over the suit radio: "All set."

Then Crawley had chinned his suited bulk into an airlock in the ceiling of the corridor, and disappeared from view.

Crawley secured the inner door of the airlock and ascended the metal ladder to the underside of the hull. A moment later, the outer door of the lock slid into the smooth metal skin of the spaceship, revealing a black rectangle of space gleaming with cold, faraway pinpoints of starlight. Crawley had seen it a million times—the utter blackness, the glittering stars, man's awesome, final frontier—but it never failed to stir something in him. Some men couldn't take it. Some men had to keep away from the observation ports while in space. Some few were indifferent. For Crawley, though, the black rectangle of space spelled out—in letters mankind could not fully understand yet—the challenge of the vast, bewildering unknown.

Clomping along the hull on magnet-shod feet, Crawley counted three escape hatches on his left and let himself into the last one. The small airlock—in which Crawley could not stand upright—was between the hull of the ship and the ceiling of the cabin. Squirming through and twisting his body around, Crawley lowered himself into the cabin.

Filling somewhat more than half the room and jammed firmly against the door was a formless mass of matter gray in color but streaked with yellow. Crawley could not have been more surprised if half a dozen naked girls had come dancing across the floor of the cabin toward him here on this all-male spaceship.

Of McCoombs and Thomp-

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son—were those their names? —Crawley saw nothing.

Crawley could feel the hackles rising on the back of his neck as he approached the thing. Gingerly, he reached out with one gauntletted hand and touched the thing. He felt little resistance, but his hand went suddenly numb and he found it hard to breathe. Cursing, he withdrew his arm and examined the tear in the fabric of his spacesuit. It was no mere rip: part of the fabric was missing.

Crawley dug his other hand into an outside pocket of his spacesuit and secured an emergency patch on the hole. He doubted if any permanent damage had been done to his hand because he could feel the fingers tingling as warmth was restored.

Suddenly, a section of the thing was flowing out across the floor toward him.

Backing away, Crawley stumbled over a chair—the only item of furniture in the room, he noticed. He scrambled to his feet and chinned himself quickly up into the escape hatch. Below him, the gray thing had enveloped the chair—which vanished quickly before Crawley could close the lock.

Had the gray thing grown? It now filled three quarters of the cabin.

Crawley got out of there in a hurry. Until today, the only extra-terrestrial life man had encountered was on Mars, where lichen and other primitive plants could thrive in the thin atmosphere of the red planet, demanding little oxygen and even less water. As he walked back across the hull of the ship, Crawley thought of an old game still played on Earth. Animal, vegetable or mineral. Well, he didn't know what the thing there in the cabin was, but he guessed it was alive. It could eat, and grow. When the troops boarded the spaceship in the asteroid belt four days ago, it must have been small enough for a man to hide it on his person. Thompson or McCoombs, one of them had brought back a souvenir.

Crawley shuddered. Without seeing it, he somehow knew the creature was still growing.

"What's going on here?" Crawley said.

A double-line of soldiers formed a semi-circle around the door to cabin seven. Harris and Major Merton were standing off on one side, but Harris came over and

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helped Crawley emerge from his spacesuit. "Take a look," he said, and pointed.

The gray thing had eaten its way through the door, protruding two full yards into the corridor.

"What the hell is that thing?" Sam Harris asked.

"You boys worried?" Major Merton asked them. "You can stop now. I'm taking charge."

"What are you going to do?" Crawley wanted to know.

"Kill it, of course. Here now, step out of the way."

Crawley shook his head. "Just a minute, major. How do you plan on killing it?"

"What do you mean, how? It's alive, isn't it?"

"I'd say so."

"Then if it's alive, I can kill it. Are you ready, sergeant?"

A soldier in the first rank said, "Yes, sir."

"Then fire at my command."

The soldiers were armed with energy-rifles, Crawley saw. Firing a minute atomic charge, it was a good infantry weapon. It was lethal at any range up to a thousand yards and the soldiers stood directly in front of the growing gray thing.

"Ready!" called the major. "Aim! Fire!"

The energy rifles roared. Kneeling soldiers fired two charges each in the first rank. The second rank, standing, fired over their heads.

"See what I mean, boys?" the major said happily.

Crawley squinted through glare-blinded eyes, but could see nothing. There were hoarse shouts, loud screams, a rushing, foot-pounding noise.

The kneeling row of soldiers, Crawley finally saw, had disappeared — energy rifles and all. The second rank had fled a dozen yards down the corridor. In the space of a few seconds, the gray thing had grown twenty feet and more from the door of cabin seven, filling the corridor from side to side waist high.

"What happened?" Harris asked, rubbing his eyes.

The major bleated. "What the hell kind of cargo are you carrying anyhow, Crawley?"

"Nothing but your soldiers, major. But this strikes me as a stupid time for that kind of argument."

"What do you mean, stupid time? I'm not arguing. I was asking."

"And I told you. One of your troopers must have found that thing out in the asteroids and brought it aboard."

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"I don't think so."

"I mean, where could he have hid it? You're crazy, boy."

"It wasn't always this big. I saw it growing while I was in the cabin. We all saw how it could grow out here."

The major snorted and turned to face one of his enlisted men. "All right, where are the rest of you? Where'd you all go?"

"Begging your pardon, sir—"

"Answer me, sergeant! Don't beg my pardon."

The sergeant pointed. "In . . . in there, sir."

"In *there?*"

Sam Harris looked green, as if he were going to be sick. All at once, it struck Crawley. The thing had eaten the first rank of soldiers in a matter of seconds. *Eaten them.* . . .

"We'll try another volley," snapped the major. You couldn't blame him. This is how he had been trained. This is how he was taught to fight —anything.

"Listen," said Crawley, "I wouldn't."

"You're not in charge."

"It's my ship, major. Don't go pulling rank on me."

"Why wouldn't you, boy?"

"Because that thing isn't natural. Not as we understand natural to mean. It grows too fast. It can probably eat energy as well as matter. When your men fire at it, you're only feeding it."

"That is ridiculous. Unless you know more about this thing than you care to admit, Crawley."

"I said one of your men brought it aboard ship."

"My men were told not to bring souvenirs of any kind, although why you spaceship people insist on that regulation is beyond me."

"That's why," said Crawley, pointing at the gray thing, which by now had edged forward another yard or two in the corridor.

"My men wouldn't—"

"Begging your pardon, sir," the sergeant said again. "But when we came aboard, McCoombs had something."

"What's that?"

"Well, sir, it was an egg. He had an egg."

"An egg?"

"Yes, sir. Found it on Ceres, he said. An egg."

"Well, goddamn," swore Sam Harris.

"When we find McCoombs, he'll be court-martialed," the major said. "Boys, get ready for another volley."

"You're only helping it," Crawley said wearily.

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"Mr. Crawley, I don't tell you how to pilot a spaceship. Don't tell me how to do my job. You boys ready?"

"Yes, sir," said the sergeant.

"Fire at will. Everything you've got, boys. Let's go!"

The din was terrific. Energy-rifles thundered in the narrow corridor for a steady three minutes.

When Crawley could see again, the gray mass, like slow, crawling jelly, had grown down the corridor toward them. Its quivering, expectant edge was three feet from the line of soldiers.

"Hold your positions!" cried Major Merton. "Reload! Fire!"

Crawley said, "Shut up, damn you. You'll kill these men. Let's all get the devil out of here."

The soldiers bolted and ran.

"I'm going to report you to your company," Major Merton said.

Crawley looked at Sam Harris. It was no time for smiling, but he managed it. "Gosh," he said.

Twenty four hours later, they had a council of war in the control cabin.

"Are you convinced?" Crawley asked the major.

"Not by a long shot. We've got to use bigger stuff, boy. Bigger stuff."

"You already tried hand-weapons, anti-tank jobs, nerve gas and God knows what else."

"I have a trump card, Crawley. Tactical A-cannon. It'll knock hell out of the rear of your spaceship, but—"

Crawley cut him off. "If I thought it would work, I'd say go ahead. I don't think you realize it, major, but we're in trouble."

"I realize that thing's dangerous, Crawley."

"First it was an egg," said Crawley. "Then it filled half the cabin back there. Then it grew down the corridor and ate its way through the troop-quarters. All your men are up here in the front of the ship now."

"All right, it's ruining your ship. That's why we've got to stop it."

"That's not why," said Crawley grimly. "It's already half as big as the ship itself, and still growing. Pretty soon it will fill the whole ship, major. Don't you see, we have no place to run? We're in space, major. When that thing eats out the whole inside of the ship, it has us too."

Major Merton's red face drained of color. "Then that's

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precisely why I have to stop it."

"Don't you see, those energy weapons have no effect. The thing can eat energy as well as matter."

"Nothing can eat raw energy, Crawley!"

"That baby can," said Sam Harris. "We saw it."

"Do you know your astro-history?" Crawley asked the major.

"Never took much interest in it, Crawley. Sit and read. Waste of time."

"Well, here's a lesson for you. That thing isn't life as we know it. The egg was incredibly old—exactly how old, I don't know. But it came from the asteroids."

"So?"

"So, the asteroids were once a planet circling the sun between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. Billion years ago, maybe. Then it went boom. No one knows why, but a planet which once was the size of Mars is now a few million scattered hunks of rock. That egg which McCoombs picked up must have been lying out there, cold and lifeless—and waiting—for a billion years. It's a different kind of life, major. It eats organic matter, it eats wood, metal, energy, anything. You can't kill it with rays or bombs. Please take my word for it. You'll only make the thing grow more rapidly."

Something had gone out of Major Merton. But only temporarily, Crawley thought. "What are you going to do?" the major asked.

Sam Harris said: "We're setting the automatic pilot for deep space."

"What for?"

"If that thing grows at its present rate," Harris went on, "it will fill the entire ship by the time we reach Earth. The ship will land on automatic—and the thing will keep on growing, when it gets to Earth."

"My men are due back at the base in Antarctica tomorrow noon."

Harris shrugged. "We'd all like to get back. We don't want to endanger Earth unnecessarily. If we're going to die either way, there's no sense making trouble for the folks at home, huh?"

"Listen," said the major, "you boys are pretty bright. I've been thinking of what you said. I learned a little biology once and I remember this: the waste products of every living thing are poison to it. Like carbon dioxide kills men and other breathing animals. Can't we poison this

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creature with its own waste products?"

Crawley nodded approval, but said, "It's a good try, major. But it won't work."

"Why not?"

"The thing is different. Its metabolism is different. Earth life builds up protoplasm by a process called anabolism, breaks it down by a process called catabolism. That's where the poison comes in. But this thing grows too fast."

"I don't follow you."

"It's all anabolism. No catabolism. No poison, major. It just grows and grows, maybe indefinitely."

"Indefinitely?"

"It's been lying around for a billion years inside an egg. Now it's out. It's hungry. It eats, without eliminating waste products. It can assimilate anything, which is why we're not going back to Earth."

"Then what you're doing is committing suicide! And making my men commit suicide too!"

"I didn't say that. If we can find a way to kill it, we'll head back to Earth. Otherwise, no."

Just then, two soldiers came into the control cabin. "Sir," one of them said, his voice edged thinly with fear, "it's still getting bigger. We're all in the fore observation area now. We're crowded there like sardines. It's coming down the companionway, sir. It doesn't have far to come."

The major stood up. "Boys," he said, "we're going to try that A-cannon. You still have it?"

"In the observation area, sir."

Crawley shook his head. "I'll have to order you not to. That thing will eat atomic energy, major."

"You can't order *me!*"

"You'll wind up killing us all."

"I'm responsible for the safety of my men. If you want to sit here, flying off to God knows where, go ahead. I want action."

"Give me a few hours," said Crawley. "Let me think."

"Uh-uh. I'm going to stop that thing once and for all."

Harris looked at Crawley, who nodded. Harris walked to the doorway of the control cabin and stood there. "You're not leaving this room, major," he said.

"Get out of my way."

Major Merton tried to brush by Harris, but the co-pilot stood his ground grimly. Merton snorted and reached

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for a hand weapon at his side. He pointed it at Harris and said, "If you're not out of the way when I count to three, I'm going to shoot you."

"For crying out loud," Harris said.

"One!"

Harris looked mutely at Crawley.

"Two!"

"What the hell, Sam," Crawley said. "Let him go."

Major Merton stalked from the cabin, then turned and called over his shoulder: "Stevens, Feldman — place these two men under arrest. They'll only get in the way. I'll kill that thing and bring this ship in safely if I have to do it alone."

"I'm sorry," one of the soldiers told Crawley. "You'll have to stay here in the cabin. Major's orders."

"Can think here as well as anyplace, I guess," Crawley muttered.

"You got something?" Harris asked.

"I don't know. But it's a cinch Merton wants to do things his own way now."

Harris lit a cigaret. "You better think of something soon, Ed. I draw nothing but blanks."

Five minutes later, with the fore area of the spaceship protected by a great shield of lead, the atomic cannon was fired point blank at the gray eating thing which was busy assimilating everything in the rear area of the spaceship—and growing.

Major Merton returned to the control cabin soon after the sounds of the explosion had died away. His red face wore a broad grin. He was beaming. "Well," he said, "I told you. We blew it to pieces. Got to have a little faith in your weapons, that's all."

"You did what?" Harris said, disbelief on his face.

"Blew it to shreds. I saw it happen with my own eyes. Want to come out and take a look?"

"Hell, yes," said Harris.

But before they could get started, a soldier entered the room breathlessly. "Sir!" he cried. "It's still there."

"What are you talking about?"

"Bigger than ever. We only stopped it temporarily, sir. It's eaten clean through the lead shield. It's still coming. Every minute it's bigger."

"I don't believe you," Major Merton snorted.

Harris suggested, "Let's take a look now."

Gray pseudopods had been

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thrust into the forward observation area, the last sanctuary before the control cabin itself. The two-hundred soldiers were huddled against the near wall of the observation area, a great cathedral-like vault with a domed glassite ceiling. When Major Merton strode in, followed by Crawley and Harris, no one bothered to salute. The major didn't notice this breach of military discipline. He stared, instead, in growing horror at the far wall.

The pseudopods crawled slowly up the wall and hung there. The wall shook and began to crumble, huge cracks appearing in its surface. It fell with a crash as the huge bulk of the creature forced its way sluggishly, with jerky, quivering movements, into the observation area.

Harris looked at Crawley. "How long, Ed?"

"About an hour, I think. Maybe less. Major, tell your men not to shoot at it—with anything. Tell them to keep away from it and keep still. Understand?"

"Anything," said Major Merton. "Yes, Mr. Crawley."

One hour, Ed Crawley thought. At its present rate of growth, the creature would engulf them in one hour, eating its way forward in the spaceship until there was no place else to go. Crawley walked into the control cabin with Harris and flicked a switch which made a flickering image of the outside of the spaceship appear on the screen. Almost the entire rear of the ship had disappeared, the metal hull being replaced by the gray jelly of the asteroid creature.

"That's funny," Harris said.

"What?"

"I thought you said it likes energy?"

"It sure does. All kinds."

"It hasn't bothered to work its way clean back to the rocket tubes. The only way it's moved is forward."

Crawley checked the flickering image on the screen. Harris was right; the rocket tubes at the rear of the spaceship were untouched.

Crawley stood up and prowled about the control cabin restlessly. The creature didn't like something back there. It was afraid of something near or in the rocket tubes. Something there could kill it.

Crawley had not much more than three quarters of an hour to find out what that something was.

You take an egg—not any

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egg, but an egg which has been waiting out there in the bleak, airless cold of the asteroids for a billion years—and let it hatch inside your spaceship. The thing inside comes out and grows, and keeps on growing, and apparently nothing can stop it. Then you learn something unexpected.

It loves energy. It thrives on energy.

But it's afraid of rocket tubes, which spout more energy than anything else on the ship. It also recoils, temporarily, from the blast of an atomic cannon, then feeds on its energy.

"Hell," said Crawley, "I'm no scientist."

"They're getting anxious out there," Sam Harris told him. "That thing's halfway across the observation area now, and still coming."

You take a cold egg from the depths of outer space, and . . .

Suddenly, Crawley rushed for the rear wall of the control cabin, where he twisted a dial, then stood back and examined it as if it were something lethal.

"What in heck are you doing?" Sam Harris wanted to know.

"You find it cold in here?" Crawley asked him.

"Not particularly."

"Neither do I, but I'm going to fry someone."

"What did you say?"

"I'm going to fry someone. Either us or that thing back there, whichever hollers uncle first."

Half an hour later, a hundred of the soldiers had crowded into the control cabin. They had stripped down to their shorts and were bathed in sweat. Crawley could feel the terrible heat making his head throb painfully and thrusting little lances of pain under his eyelids.

"Something's wrong with the heat control," Major Merton said. "Fix it, Crawley. My men have enough to worry about."

Crawley jabbed a finger against the major's sweating chest. His skin was a pale, delicate pink. "You shut up," Crawley said. "Just don't bother me."

It was too hot to care about anything. The heat engulfed them in waves, from the walls, the ceiling, the floor. Crawley had turned the thermostat all the way up. Sweat dripped from his armpits, his hands, his face. His eyes stung with the acid of his perspiration. If it worked,

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fine. A wild guess would make him a hero. If it didn't work, they'd all be dead in a few minutes.

A gray pseudopod coiled in tentatively through the cabin door. Outside, the men were cornered against a wall, and shouting.

Another pseudopod entered the cabin.

"A hundred and thirty-nine degrees," Harris called in a weak voice.

In Saudi Arabia, the hottest place on Earth, the temperature at midday sometimes reached a hundred and forty. Men would die if exposed too long to that kind of heat.

Brook trout, Crawley thought in a growing, lethargic stupor, their finny bodies unable to regulate internal temperature like a mammal could, would perish at eighty-five or ninety degrees.

"A hundred and forty!" Harris cried, watching the wall thermometer.

Crawley saw everything through a red haze. The air danced and shimmered before his eyes. He gulped in great lungfuls of air but wasn't getting enough oxygen. His skin had begun to itch intolerably. He was sweating all over but he felt bone dry.

Another pseudopod coiled into the control cabin, hovering there.

It trembled, flopping and bouncing loudly against the floor.

It quivered.

"A hundred and forty-five," said Harris.

Half the men were unconscious. Major Merton glared at Crawley as if this was the final, intolerable insult. His men were going to die anyway, his eyes said, so why did they have to die in agony.

The quivering pseudopod flopped up and down sluggishly now, its gray, jelly-like surface blackening.

It lay there, black and unmoving.

In a daze, Crawley forced his way through the sweating, wretching crowd of half-naked soldiers and twisted the thermostat dial toward cold.

"Three things," Crawley told Sam Harris later. "First, it was existing for a billion years in the depths of space, where the temperature's not much above absolute zero. Second, the atomic cannon made it retreat temporarily. Third, it didn't go near the rocket tubes. There's intense heat in the first split-second of an atomic blast, Sam. And heat in the rocket tubes."

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"Yes, but—"

"A man, a mammal, can adjust its internal temperature in a fairly wide range. It shivers in the cold, the contracting muscles releasing energy. It sweats in the heat, the evaporation cooling it. Other animals can't do that. Ever see a rattle-snake sunning itself on a rock? Drowsy, unmoving, half dead?

"That thing out there was no mammal. It couldn't regulate to heat. It got roasted a beautiful black," smiled Crawley, "a gorgeous, wonderful black—and died."

Major Merton's men were chopping up the dead creature —except for the part which now made up the aft hull— and evacuating large, hardened blocks of its remains through the waste hatches of the ship. Now the major entered the control cabin as Sam Harris reset the automatic pilot for Earth.

"See?" the major demanded. "You've got to have faith. It was the atomic cannon which did it, Crawley. A delayed reaction. Powerful stuff, atomics. I told you we could do it."

"Atomics!" cried Sam Harris. "You think—"

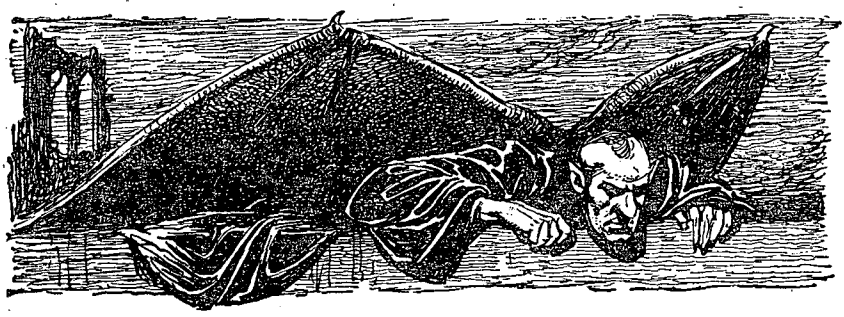
Crawley winked at him. "Good going, major."

"I see you have the heat business all cleared up now."

"All cleared up," Crawley said, and grinned at Harris. "All cleared up."

The major marched outside to supervise the work of his men.

Harris winked at Crawley, who smiled again. Crawley did not want the glory. Let the major have it; that was part of his career. But if the scientists back on Earth, working with a specimen from the hull of the ship, could make space a safer frontier for man, Crawley would be then content and satisfied. **THE END**



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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The true drama of any disaster is not found in headlines, but in the routine work of those who get the facts and do their job; like the men who type the—

NITE FILE

BY STAN BAER

A97LA
(HOLLYWOOD SHORTS—ADVANCE FOR SUNDAY AMS JUNE 18—THIRD ADD—XXX MOVIE PROFITS.)

HOLLYWOOD—(NPA)—NEWCOMER JOHN LYNN, WHO COULD BE A CONCERT PIANIST, RADIO STAR OR ACTOR IN THE LEGITIMATE THEATER—HE'S HAD OFFERS TO DO ALL THIS AND MORE—HAS DECIDED INSTEAD TO CONCENTRATE ON EMOTING FOR THE SCREEN. HIS NEXT PICTURE IS "CORRALLED," A WESTERN, SEQUEL TO "ROUNDUP" IN WHICH LYNN PLAYED THE TOUGH, HARD-BITTEN U. S. MARSHAL CLINT CODY. HE PORTRAYS CODY GNI"ONEP$
BUST IT BUST IT
A QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER THE LAZY DOG'S BACK.
A QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER THE LAZY DOG'S BACK.
1234567890 KX SENDING
A QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER THE LAZY DOG'S BACK.
1234567890 KX SENDING

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WOT'S THE TRBL?
XXXXXXXXXXXXX
DUNNO
XXXXX
SUMPIN'S WRONG, I GUESS
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
YEH
XXX
—17—
EDITORS
BBB AND SPTS WIRE DWN WEST OF KANSAS CITY. SKED ON AAA UNTIL FONERS FIX. PLS LIMIT MSGS AND STRYS TO ESSENTLS. TNX.

KX
JUNE 10 AT628CST NM
LA
GA WITH ADVANCE ON AAA
KX
JUNE 10 AT632CST NM
A97LA
(HOLLYWOOD SHORTS—ADVANCE FOR SUNDAY AMS JUNE 18—THIRD ADD—XXX MOVIE PROFITS.)

HOLLYWOOD—(NPA)—NEWCOMER JOHN LYNN, WHO COULD BE A CONCERT PIANIST, RADIO STAR OR ACTOR IN THE LEGITIMATE THEATER IEPOT'#)$)$'8402$(QITSR
BUST IT BUST IT
A97JX
BULLETIN
JUNCTION CITY, KAS., JUNE 10—(NPA)—THOUSANDS ARE DEAD, INJURED OR MISSING TONIGHT IN SARINA, KAS., AS A RESULT OF A TREMENDOUS EXPLOSION WHICH VIRTUALLY RAZED THE CITY
THE MYSTERIOUS BLAST ORIGINATED AT 6:18 P.M. CST IN THE VICINITY OF THE RAILROAD FREIGHT YARD LOCATED NEAR THE CENTER OF THE TOWN, A FLOUR MILLING COMMUNITY OF OVER 20,000.

GF641CST
A98JX
BULLETIN MATTER
(FIRST ADD EXPLOSION—XXX OVER 20,000.)
ALL LINES OF COMMUNICATION OUT OF SARINA HAVE BEEN DISRUPTED BY THE EXPLOSION BUT LATEST REPORTS REACHING HERE BY TELEPHONE FROM A FARMHOUSE TEN MILES OUT OF THE STRICKEN CITY INDICATE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MOST OF SARINA'S DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS ARE ABLAZE AND SPORADIC FIRES HAVE BROKEN OUT IN THE RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT. BOTH KANSAS METHODIST UNIVERSITY AND WATERMAN COLLEGE AND ACADEMY HAVE SUFFERED SEVERE DAMAGE. THREE LARGE FLOUR MILLS IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE RAILROAD YARD ARE BELIEVED COMPLETELY DESTROYED. THE HUGE GOVERNMENT GRAIN ELEVATOR WAS ALSO IN THE AREA OF GREATEST DAMAGE.

RED CROSS AID IS BEING RUSHED TO SARINA FROM HERE, HUTCHINSON AND WICHITA, KAS., AS CASUALTIES MOUNT. THE PARTIALLY DESTROYED 24-BED SARINA GENERAL HOSPITAL IS BEING EVACUATED IN THE FACE OF SPREADING FIRE.

GF647CST

JX

KNOW UR PLANNING TO COVER XPLSN STRY TIL STAFFERS FROM KX ARRIVE. ALSO PUSH FOTOS IF PSBL. TNX.

NEW YORK VIA KX

JUNE 10 AT702CST NM

KX

SKEDDING 150 XPLSN SIDEBAR

JX

JUNE 10 GF707CST NM

—17—

EDITORS

FYI BBB AND SPTS WIRE DOWN INDEFINITELY WEST OF SARINA RESULT OF XPLSN. CONTINUE SKEDS ON AAA BUT PLS KEEP STYS AND MSGS TO MINIMUM.

TNX

KX

JUNE 10 AT710CST NM

JX

COME IN WITHOUT SKEDDING XPLSN STYS PLS. TNX.

KX

JUNE 10 AT710CST NM

A99JX

(WITH EXPLOSION)

JUNCTION CITY, KAS., JUNE 10—(NPA)—"IT WAS JUST LIKE AN ATOM BOMB," SAID AN EYEWITNESS OF THE BLAST WHICH HAS LEFT SARINA, KAS. IN RUINS TONIGHT. THE EYEWITNESS, GEORGE H. ARMSTRONG, A WHEAT FARMER, WENT ON:

"I WAS DRIVING ALONG THE HIGHWAY TOWARD MY FARM FROM SARINA. FIRST THERE WAS A BIG FLASH OF LIGHT.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AND THEN, WHEN I TURNED TO SEE WHAT IT WAS, THERE WAS SMOKE ALL OVER THE SKY IN A BIG MUSHROOM LIKE THE PICTURES OF THE ATOM BOMB. I THINK I EVEN FELT PRESSURE FROM THE EXPLOSION BUT IT COULD HAVE JUST BEEN MY CAR JOLTING ALONG THE ROAD."

UPON ARRIVAL AT HIS HOME, LOCATED SEVEN MILES FROM SARINA, ARMSTRONG FOUND THE WINDOWS OF HIS FARMHOUSE SHATTERED BY THE FORCE OF THE BLAST. HIS WIFE AND TWO DAUGHTERS WERE UNHARMED.

AMONG OTHER WITNESSES OF THE EXPLOSION WERE MR. AND MRS. HENRY VAIL OF KANSAS CITY WHO HAD BEEN DRIVING FROM THEIR DAUGHTER'S HOME IN SARINA WHEN IT OCCURRED.

"IT WAS HORRIBLE," MRS. VAIL SAID, "THERE WAS THIS BRIGHT LIGHT—BRIGHTER THAN ANY I HAVE EVER SEEN AND I EVEN FELT HEAT. I LOOKED BACK TOWARD SARINA AND THE WHOLE TOWN WAS BURNING. I PRAY TO GOD MY DAUGHTER AND HER FAMILY ARE SAFE."

MR. JOSEPH CARTWRIGHT, OF WICHITA, A TRUCKDRIVER WHO SAW THE EXPLOSION, DESCRIBED IT AS "ALL HELL BREAKING LOOSE."

"I HAVEN'T SEEN SO MUCH FIREWORKS SINCE I WAS IN THE ARMY IN EUROPE DURING THE WAR. AT FIRST I THOUGHT IT WAS THE RUSSIANS AND I LOOKED IN THE SKY FOR A PLANE BUT I NEVER SAW ANY," HE SAID.

GF727CST

A100LA
(HOLLYWOOD SHORTS—ADVANCE FOR SUNDAY AMS JUNE 18—THIRD ADD—XXX MOVIE PROFITS.)

HOLLY£"EF (((J
BUST IT BUST IT
—95—
(SECOND ADD XPLSN—XXX SPREADING FIRE.)

MANY OF SARINA'S MOST PROMINENT CITIZENS, INCLUDING CITY MANAGER DELTON F. SHELTON, WHO WERE ATTENDING A CIVIC LEADERS BANQUET IN SARINA'S HOTEL KANSAN ARE STILL MISSING. OTHER RESIDENTS ARE FLEEING THE FLAMING CITY IN AUTOMOBILES, TRUCKS, ON BICYCLES AND EVEN ON FOOT, CROWDING THE HIGHWAYS. THE NUMBER OF DEAD AND INJURED IS STAGGERING. AS YET MEDICAL AID IS NOT AVAILABLE IN THE DEVASTATED CITY

GF740CST

KX

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

600—SANTA ANITA RESULTS, GOLF & BB SUMS
200—MURDER OF PROMINENT CITIZEN
150—FINISH UP ON HOLLYWOOD ADV.
PLS? TNX.
LA
JUNE 10 PR601PST NM
KX
300—TEXAS OUT
250—TRFC ACDNT
100—BRITE
400—SPTS
DN
JUNE 10 MS753CST
—17—
EDITORS
PLS FONE ESSNTL STYS OR SEND VIA WU
KX
JUNE 10 AT757CST NM
NY VIA KX
FOTOS SENT BY ARMY JEEP TO WICHITA FOR WIREPHOTO 7:15 P. M. CST. ARMY MUST PASS THEM FOR PUBLICATION.
JX
JUNE 10 GF825CST NM
A101TP
—95—
(WITH EXPLOSION)
TOPEKA, KAS., JUNE 10—(NPA)—DECLARING A STATE OF EMERGENCY TO EXIST IN SARINA, KAS. TONIGHT, GOVERNOR PATTMAN OF KANSAS ORDERED ALL RESIDENTS OF SARINA EVACUATED TO A PLACE OF SAFETY BEYOND THE CITY LIMITS BY 6:00 A.M. CST. SOLDIERS OF THE FOURTH MECHANIZED CAVALRY UNIT SENT FROM FT. RILEY WILL WORK WITH STATE TROOPERS TO ENFORCE THE GOVERNOR'S ORDER.

THE GOVERNOR ASKED THE AID OF VOLUNTEERS FROM UNSTRICKEN AREAS AROUND SARINA. "THE COOPERATION OF THE RESIDENTS OF THE AREA IMMEDIATELY BEYOND THE SARINA CITY LIMITS IS ASKED IN HOUSING AND CARING FOR THE HOMELESS VICTIMS OF THIS TERRIBLE EXPLOSION UNTIL STATE WELFARE AGENCIES AND THE RED CROSS CAN PROVIDE EMERGENCY FACILITIES FOR THEM," GOVERNOR PATTMAN SAID. EVERY EFFORT WILL BE MADE TO HELP THE PEOPLE OF SARINA. THIS IS THE WORST DISASTER IN THE HISTORY OF THE STATE."

"I HAVE MANY CLOSE FRIENDS IN SARINA," GOVERNOR

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PARTMAN WENT ON, "AM

"I HAVE MANY CLOSE FRIENDS IN SARINA," GOVERNOR PARTMAN WENT ON, "AMONG THEM CITY MANAGER SHELTON AND DR. GETLING, PRESIDENT OF KANSAS METHODIST. AS YET WE DON'T KNOW WHETHER THEY ARE ALIVE OR DEAD. WE ARE ALL PRAYING FOR THEM AND WE WILL MAKE CERTAIN THE UTMOST IS DONE TO ALLEVIATE THE SUFFERING AND KEEP THE DESTRUCTION TO A MINIMUM."

STATE INVESTIGATORS HAVE ALSO BEEN SENT OUT FROM HERE TO DETERMINE THE CAUSE OF THE MYSTERIOUS BLAST THAT CAUGHT MANY SARINA RESIDENTS AT THEIR SUPPER TABLE.

ST840CST

HI, DE
XXXXX
HOWDY. WHOOZIZ?
XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
FO, THAT'S WHO
XXXXXXXXXXXX
RUFF NITE, WOT?
XXXXXXXXXXXXX
WOKIN' MY FINGERS TO THE BONE.
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
SAME HERE
XXXXXXXXX
TERRIBL, AIN'T IT?
XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
YEH
XXX
TP

RE UR A101 (WITH EXPLOSION) GOV.'S NAME COMES PATTMAN, PARTMAN—WHICH IS CQ?

KX

JUNE 10 AT901CST NM

A102JX
BULLETIN
(FIRST LEAD EXPLOSION)
JUNCTION CITY, KAS., JUNE 10—(NPA)—THE REACTION OF X-RAY PLATES IN THE PORTABLE RED CROSS X-RAY UNITS TO THE ATMOSPHERE AROUND SARINA, KAS. INDICATE THE EXPLOSION WHICH RAZED THE CITY AND RENDERED MORE THAN 15,000 INHABITANTS HOMELESS TONIGHT MAY BE OF ATOMIC ORIGIN. PHYSICISTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS (AT LAWRENCE) AND REPRESENTATIVES OF

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION ARE CHECKING THE CITY FOR RADIO-ACTIVITY.

GF814CST

A103JX

BULLETIN MATTER

(FIRST ADD—FIRST LEAD EXPLOSION—XXX FOR RADIO-ACTIVITY.)

MANY INJURED SURVIVORS REPORTING TO RED CROSS AID STATIONS EXHIBIT BURNS NOT UNLIKE THOSE CAUSED BY ATOMIC RADIATION. OTHER EVIDENCE THAT THE EXPLOSION MAY HAVE BEEN ATOMIC IN ORIGIN ARE THE EXTREME HEAT, THE EXTENT OF DAMAGE AND THE LARGE NUMBER OF FIRES CAUSED BY THE BLAST.

A TEN MILE AREA CENTERING IN SARINA WAS AFFECTED. SOME WINDOWS IN HOUSES AS FAR AS 20 MILES AWAY WERE BROKEN AND THE FLASH WAS SEEN FROM A WATER TOWER NEAR KANOPOLIS, KAS. 30 MILES ACROSS THE PLAINS.

THE MYSTERIOUS BLAST XXX—(PICKING UP SECOND GRAF A97JX)

GF927CST

HEY DE, STILL THERE?

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

THOT MEBBE U WERE ASLEEP OR SUMPIN'

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

WHO'S ASLEEP. WE'LL HAVE NO SLEEPIN ON THIS WIRE.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

THAT U DE? WHO SAY DAT??????

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

NOT ME—DE

XXXXXXXXX

WHO DEN?

XXXXXXXX

RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED RAINDEER!!

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

A104JX

(WITH EXPLOSION)

JUNCTION CITY, KAS., JUNE 10—(NPA)—A SARINA RAILROAD WORKER HERE SAYS TONIGHT THAT THE ARMY HAD BEEN SHIPPING SECRET MATERIAL IN REFRIGERATOR CARS THROUGH SARINA WHICH MAY HAVE CAUSED THE EXPLOSION THAT DEVASTATED THE FLOUR MILLING TOWN.

DAVID P. MOTTER, ASSISTANT FOREMAN OF THE SARINA FREIGHT YARD SAID: "EVER SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR II STRANGE REFRIGERATOR CARLOADS OF SECRET

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ARMY MATERIAL WHICH REQUIRED SPECIAL HANDLING HAVE PASSED THROUGH SARINA GOING EAST. NONE OF US IN THE FREIGHT YARD KNEW WHAT IT WAS BUT NOW I BELIEVE IT WAS SOME SORT OF EXPLOSIVE THAT MAY HAVE GONE OFF ACCIDENTALLY TONIGHT."

"WE ALWAYS HAD TO GIVE THESE 'REFER' CARS SPECIAL ATTENTION AND WE WERE ALWAYS TOLD NEVER TO REVEAL ANY INFORMATION AS TO THE AMOUNT OF THESE SHIPMENTS AND WHEN THEY CAME THROUGH. IN FACT, I'M NOT SURE I SHOULD BE TELLING THIS MUCH BUT TWO OF MY FAMILY ARE DEAD, MY WIFE IS SERIOUSLY INJURED AND MOST OF MY FRIENDS AND FELLOW WORKERS ARE MISSING AS A RESULT OF THIS TERRIBLE THING. IF BY REVEALING THIS I CAN HELP TO SOLVE THE MYSTERY AND FIND OUT WHO CAUSED IT I WILL DO IT. I AM HERE NOW ONLY BY THE GRACE OF GOD."

ARMY HEADQUARTERS AT FT. RILEY REFUSED TO CONFIRM MOTTER'S STORY OF SECRET SHIPMENTS BUT IT IS KNOWN THAT THE EXPLOSION ORIGINATED IN THE VICINITY OF THE FREIGHT YARD. THE ARMY SPOKESMAN SAID THEY KNEW NOTHING OF SECRET REFRIGERATOR CAR SHIPMENTS. HE ADDED THAT IT WAS UNLIKELY THAT ANY FORM OF EXPLOSIVE USED AT FT. RILEY WOULD REQUIRE REFRIGERATION.

ALL EXPLOSIVE AND MUNITIONS MATERIAL TRANSPORTED BY RAIL TO FT. RILEY REQUIRE SPECIAL ATTENTION BUT DO NOT REQUIRE THE STRINGENT SECURITY REGULATIONS MOTTER DESCRIBED.

GF956CST

A105JX
(WITH EXPLOSION)
BY FREDERIC X STRATHMORE
NATIONAL PRESS ASSOCIATES STAFF CARRESPONDENT

RED CROSS FIELD HEADQUARTERS, SEVEN MILES SOUTHEAST OF SARINA, KAS., JUNE 10—SARINA, KAS. IS THE MERE HOLLOW SHELL OF A CITY TONIGHT. ITS EMPTY STREETS AND TWISTED BUILDINGS ARE LIT BY THE GHASTLY GLOW OF COUNTLESS SPORADIC FIRES THAT RAGE UNCHECKED IN EVERY SECTION OF THE CITY. THE DESTRUCTION IN SARINA IS BEYOND DESCRIPTION. HORRIBLY REMINISCENT OF HIROSHIMA AND BOMBED-OUT EUROPEAN CITIES, EVERYTHING IS EITHER REDUCED TO RUBBLE OR GUTTED BY FIRE AND EXPLOSION.

CASUALTIES ARE TREMENDOUS. THERE ARE NO ACCURATE FIGURES AS YET BUT ESTIMATES RANGE FROM

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FIFTY—TO EIGHTY-FIVE-PERCENT OF THE POPULATION KILLED, INJURED OR MISSING. FROM FIRST HAND OBSERVATION, THE NUMBER OF SARINA'S CITIZENS WHO ESCAPED THE EXPLOSION UNHARMED APPEAR TO BE DEFINITELY IN THE MINORITY. IT IS PRETTY SAFE TO SAY THAT SCARCELY A FAMILY HAS BEEN LEFT UNMARKED BY TRAGEDY.

HERE AT THE RED CROSS FIELD HEADQUARTERS THE AIR RESOUNDS WITH THE CRIES OF THE INJURED AND DYING AND WITH THE WAILS OF THE AMBULANCES WHICH ARRIVE AND DEPART AT THE RATE OF ONE EVERY FIVE MINUTES. "WHY SHOULD IT HAPPEN TO ME?" ONE YOUNG WOMAN DYING OF BURNS CRIES PATHETICALLY. ANOTHER WOMAN HAS TO BE RESTRAINED FROM TRYING TO FIND HER MISSING BABY. AN OLD MAN SITS IN THE CORNER SHAKING HIS WHITE HEAD AND MUTTERING OVER AND OVER AGAIN: "WHAT HAPPENED?"

CONVOYS OF AMBULANCES ARE ESCORTED DOWN THE HIGHWAYS BY STATE POLICE TO HOSPITALS AT FT. RILEY, JUNCTION CITY, AND HUTCHINSON, KAS. SOME INJURED ARE EVEN SENT AS FAR AS WICHITA FOR HOSPITALIZATION. ELABORATE ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN SET UP BY THE RED CROSS AUTHORITIES TO SEND THE MOST CRITICALLY INJURED TO THE NEAREST HOSPITALS OR TO WHEREVER THE FACILITIES ARE BEST TO TAKE CARE OF THEM.

OUTSIDE, OVER AND ABOVE IT ALL, THE MOON RISES TO STARE MUTELY DOWN AT ALL THE FEVERISH ACTIVITY. THE MOON ALSO LOOKS DOWN ON THE DEVASTATED CITY IN ITS DARKEST HOUR AND THE FACE OF THE MOON REMAINS PLACID, UNCONCERNED AND QUIET—REFLECTING THE QUIET OF THE DEAD

GF1002CST

A106TP

C O R R E C T I O N

EDITORS

IN 101TP (WITH EXPLOSION) MAKE GOVERNOR'S NAME READ PATTMANN THROUGHOUT (NOT PATTMAN OR PARTMAN).

THE NATIONAL PRESS ASSOCIATES

ST1010CST

THOSE BOYS AT JX SURE GETTING WORK-OUT
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
NO KIDDIN
XXXXXXXX

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

U KNOW ANY OF EM?
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
KNOW GF—GOOD OL PAL O MINE—HA HA
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
WHAT U MEAN?
XXXXXXXXXXXX
HE'S A GOOD GUY
XXXXXXXXXXXXX
HOW'S UR WIFE & FAMILY?
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
PEGGY'S FINE BUT LIL JIM'S SICK—POISON IVY. HOW U ALL?
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
FINE. THINKING OF COMING OUT UR WAY OUR VACATION
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
GOOD. U GOT OUR ADDRESS? DROP IN AND SEE US.
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
GOT UR ADDRESS AND WILL DO LAST TWO WEEKS AUG.
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
FINE.
XXXX
A107
—95—

WASHINGTON, JUNE 10—(NPA)—"THE SARINA EXPLOSION WAS UNDOUBTEDLY CAUSED BY CARELESS HANDLING OF ATOMIC MATERIAL," SAID DR. ARTHUR V. SHELLY, FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE HANDFORD DISTRICT ATOMIC RESEARCH PROJECT TONIGHT. "I HAVE BEEN EXPECTING SOMETHING LIKE THIS TO HAPPEN FOR A LONG TIME NOW."

DR. SHELLY WENT ON:

"RED TAPE AND GENERAL INCOMPETENCY IN ENFORCING OVER-BEARING SECURITY REGULATIONS HAVE REDUCED NECESSARY SAFETY PRECAUTIONS IN THE PRODUCTION AND TRANSPORTATION OF FISSIONABLE MATERIAL DANGEROUSLY BELOW THE MINIMUM REQUIRED. AN ATOMIC BOMB OR OTHER ATOMIC PRODUCT COULD AND PROBABLY DID GO OFF IN SARINA TO DESTROY THE CITY.

"THE KNOWLEDGE OF THIS DANGER AND THAT I, AFTER REPEATED ATTEMPTS TO HAVE THE SITUATION REMEDIED, COULD DO NOTHING ABOUT IT, WERE AMONG THE FACTORS INFLUENCING MY DECISION TO RESIGN AS DIRECTOR OF THE PROJECT. I DID NOT WANT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF RISKING THOUSANDS OF LIVES FOR THE SAKE OF OVER-SECURITY."

DR. SHELLY WAS APPOINTED TO HIS POSITION AS DI-

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RECTOR OF THE HANDFORD DISTRICT ATOMIC PROJECT BY THE PRESIDENT DURING THE WAR AS AN OUTGROWTH OF HIS WORK IN NUCLEAR RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO. HE WAS ONE OF THE PIONEERS IN ATOMIC RESEARCH. AT PRESENT HE IS ON THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION.

DR. SHELLY RESIGNED AS HEAD OF THE ATOMIC PROJECT IN THE EARLY PART OF THIS YEAR AFTER A CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE INVESTIGATING THE SECURITY OF ATOMIC INFORMATION CENSURED HIM FOR "LAXNESS IN MAINTAINING SUFFICIENT SAFEGUARDS AGAINST THE LEAKAGE OF TOP SECRET MATERIAL."

RECENTLY DR. SHELLY HAS BEEN UNDER FIRE HERE FROM THE UNAMERICAN ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE WHICH ACCUSES HIM OF HAVING BELONGED TO SEVERAL ORGANIZATIONS LISTED AS SUBVERSIVE BY THE ATTORNEY GENERAL.

TU1133EST

A108

C O R R E C T I O N

EDITORS

IN A107 MAKE LEAD READ "'THE SARINA EXPLOSION MIGHT HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY CARELESS HANDLING XXX'" (PICKING UP FIRST GRAF SUBSTITUTING "MIGHT HAVE BEEN" FOR "WAS UNDOUBTEDLY".)

TNX

THE NATIONAL PRESS ASSOCIATES

TU1145EST

A109LA

(HOLLYWOOD SHORTS—ADVANCE FOR SUNDAY AMS JUNE 18—THIRD ADD—XXX MOVIE PROFITS.)

HOLLYWOOD—(NPA—NEWCOMER JOHN LYNN, WHO COULD BE A CONCERT PIANIST, RADIO STAR OR ACTOR IN THE LEGITIMATE THEATER—HE'S HAD OFFERS TO DO ALL THIS AND MORE—HAS DECIDED INSTEAD TO CONCENTRATE ON EMOTING FOR THE SCREEN. HIS NX P"(#

A109

BULLETIN

E L I M I N A T I O N

EDITORS

ELIMINATE ALL OF A104JX (WITH EXPLOSION) AND A107 (DR. SHELLY) AND A108 (CORRECTION ON A107). THE INFORMATION CONTAINED THEREIN IS ERRONEOUS AND A NEW STORY IS BEING PREPARED IN WASHINGTON TO

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SUPERCEDE THESE.

THE NATIONAL PRESS ASSOCIATES
KX
AT1051CST

A110 (RERUN OF A109)
BULLETIN

E L I M I N A T I O N

EDITORS

ELIMINATE ALL OF A104JX (WITH EXPLOSION) AND A107 (DR. SHELLY) AND A108 (CORRECTION ON A107). THE INFORMATION CONTAINED THEREIN IS ERRONEOUS AND A NEW STORY IS BEING PREPARED IN WASHINGTON TO SUPERCEDE THESE.

THE NATIONAL PRESS ASSOCIATES
KX
AT1057CST

A BIG BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER THE LAZY DOG'S BACK.
1234567890 KX SENDING
A BIG BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER THE LAZY DOG'S BACK.
1234567890 KX SENDING
A (I#MCE
BEG PARDON BUT ISN'T THAT A "QUICK" FOX, NOT "BIG"?
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
CQ. YOUSE IS A GOOD BOY.
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
A QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER THE LAZY DOG'S BACK.
1234567890 KX SENDING
A QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER THE LAZY DOG'S BACK.
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A QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER THE LAZY DOG'S BACK.
1234567890 KX SENDING
A111
BULLETIN

WASHINGTON, JUNE 10—(NPA)—IT WAS A RUSSIAN-MADE ROBOT ROCKET CONTAINING AN ATOM BOMB WHICH CAUSED THE EXPLOSION IN SARINA, KAS., THAT HAS LEFT THE SMALL FLOUR MILLING CITY IN RUINS, THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE ANNOUNCED TONIGHT IN A PREPARED STATEMENT TO THE NATIONAL PRESS ASSOCIATES.

THE MISSILE, DESCRIBED AS SIMILAR TO OUR SMALL EXPERIMENTAL MODELS OF CONTROLLED ROCKETS WAS FIRST DETECTED BY RADAR AT AN EXTREMELY HIGH ALTITUDE AND A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO INTERCEPT IT WITH ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE AND JET FIGHTERS WAS UNSUCCESSFUL.

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TU1208EST

A112

BULLETIN MATTER

(FIRST ADD—A-BOMB—XXX WAS UNSUCCESSFUL.)

SINCE THERE ARE NO VITAL MILITARY TARGETS IN SARINA IT IS ASSUMED THE BOMB WAS ACTUALLY INTENDED FOR ANY ONE OF SEVERAL DEFENSE PRODUCTION AND ARMY CENTERS IN THE MIDWEST AREA. (SARINA IS APPROXIMATELY 80 AIR MILES FROM WICHITA, A PRODUCTION CENTER OF BOEING BOMBERS AND 60 AIR MILES FROM FT. RILEY.)

THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAS ALREADY SENT A NOTE OF PROTEST TO THE RUSSIAN EMBASSY AND ALSO TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY. THE PRESIDENT IS EXPECTED TO ADDRESS CONGRESS TOMORROW REGARDING THE BOMBING. HIS MESSAGE WILL BE BROADCAST OVER ALL THE MAJOR RADIO AND TELEVISION NETWORKS

DEFENSE HEADQUARTERS AT THE PENTAGON BUILDING HAVE REFUSED TO COMMENT FURTHER ON THE ATOM BOMB EXPLOSION EXCEPT TO STATE THAT ALL MILITARY AND NAVAL PERSONNEL HAVE BEEN ALERTED AND THAT THE UNITED STATES IS PREPARED TO RETALIATE IN KIND IN THE EVENT OF THE OPENING OF HOSTILITIES WITH RUSSIA.

U1217EST

A113

A113

(WITH A-BOMB)

WASHINGTON, JUNE 10—(NPA)—THAT WE WILL BE AT WAR WITH RUSSIA OPENLY "USING GUNS INSTEAD OF WORDS" WITHIN THE NEXT WEEK AS A RESULT OF THE "SARINA MASSACRE" WAS THE PREDICTION TONIGHT OF BRIGADIER GENERAL EVERETT J. MARTIN, CHIEF OF THE ARMY QUARTERMASTER CORPS' BUREAU OF SUPPLIES AND ACCOUNTS.

"AND, FRANKLY, I EXPECT US TO BE FIGHTING EVEN SOONER—PERHAPS IN THE NEXT TWO DAYS," HE SAID.

"THE RUSSIANS DIDN'T EXACTLY CATCH US WITH OUR PANTS DOWN," THE GENERAL STATED REGARDING THE SARINA A-BOMB EXPLOSION, "WE HAVE PLENTY OF BOMBS, TOO, AND AS SOON AS CONGRESS OR THE PRESIDENT GIVES US THE WORD, WE WILL SHOW THEM WE KNOW HOW TO USE THEM, TOO."

"IN ADDITION WE CAN HAVE FULLY EQUIPPED TROOPS

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FIGHTING ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD FORTY-EIGHT HOURS AFTER THE PRESIDENT SIGNS THE DECLARATION OF WAR. WE COULD PROBABLY EVEN SET PARATROOPS DOWN ON SOME PARTS OF RUSSIA ITSELF QUICKER THAN THAT."

BRIGADIER GENERAL MARTIN HAS HELD HIS POSITION AS CHIEF OF THE BUREAU OF SUPPLIES AND ACCOUNTS SINCE 1941 WHEN HE WAS COMMANDER OF UNITED STATES ARMY FORCES IN PORTO RICO. HE HOLDS THE AIR MEDAL FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE IN THE ARMY AIR FORCE IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR. IN 1918 WHEN HE WAS PROMOTED TO THE RANK OF BRIGADIER GENERAL, HE WAS THE YOUNGEST EVER TO HOLD THAT POSITION IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY.

TU1230EST

A114

BY EDWARD W. SCHWARZ

NATIONAL PRESS ASSOCIATES WASHINGTON STAFF

WASHINGTON—THE UNITED STATES IS A NATION ON THE BRINK OF TOTAL WAR—WORLD WAR III. AFTER ONLY A FEW TEMPESTUOUS YEARS OF PEACE, THE COGS AND WHEELS—THE MACHINERY OF WAR—ARE BEING AGAIN SET INTO MOTION. MEN, SOME COMBAT VETERANS OF ANOTHER WAR AND OTHERS SCHOOLED IN THE HEARTBREAKING VICISSITUDES OF THE "KOREAN POLICE ACTION"—MEN WHO HAD FERVENTLY HOPED THEY HAD PUT ASIDE THEIR RIFLES FOREVER—ARE CALLED UPON AGAIN TO BEAR ARMS IN DEFENSE OF THEIR COUNTRY

IN A RUTHLESS SNEAK ATTACK, AN ENEMY BOMB HAS FOR THE FIRST TIME BEEN DROPPED ON AMERICAN SOIL —AN ATOM BOMB THAT HAS TAKEN A STAGGERING TOLL OF INNOCENT AMERICAN LIVES. THE CHARACTERISTIC, COMPLACENT, PEACE-LOVING NATURE OF AMERICANS HAS ONCE AGAIN BEEN TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF AND ONCE AGAIN AMERICA MUST SHOW THE WORLD THAT WE CAN AND WILL FIGHT IF PROVOKED.

WE CAN USE THE SARINA SLAUGHTER AS A LESSON IN MODERN WARFARE. OBSERVERS IN WASHINGTON HAD BEEN ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THE OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION FOR SOME TIME BUT THEY HARDLY THOUGHT RUSSIA WOULD START IT NOW. ALL REPORTS HAVE INDICATED RUSSIA WAS STILL TOO WEAK TO ATTEMPT AN ALL-OUT WAR.

HOWEVER, A NATION DOES NOT HAVE TO BE "PREPARED" IN THE OLD-FASHIONED SENSE OF HAVING A LARGE FORCE

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OF MEN UNDER ARMS OR LARGE AMOUNTS OF MILITARY SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT IN ORDER TO INITIATE AN ATOMIC ATTACK. ALL A NATION NEEDS NOWADAYS IS A GOOD SUPPLY OF ATOM AND HYDROGEN BOMBS AND ENOUGH ROBOT PLANES OR ROCKETS TO CARRY THEM TO THE ENEMY'S OWN BACKYARD.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S LETTER OF PROTEST HAS BEEN DELIVERED TO THE SOVIET EMBASSY IN WASHINGON. UPON THE REACTION OF THE RUSSIANS TO THIS NOTE DEPENDS THE DECISION OF WHETHER WE WILL GO TO WAR RIGHT AWAY OR NOT.

THERE IS NO LONGER ANY HOPE FOR THOSE WHO WERE SO RUTHLESSLY BUTCHERED IN SARINA. NO WORDS THE RUSSIANS COULD EVER UTTER WILL BRING THEM BACK, BUT WE STILL CAN HOPE THAT THE LEADERS IN MOSCOW WILL TRY IN SOMEWAY TO DEMONSTRATE A WILLINGNESS TO MAKE AMENDS. SUCH A THING IN ITSELF COULD LOOSEN THE EXISTING INTERNATIONAL TENSION AND HELP BRING ABOUT THE STABLE PEACE WE HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR FOR SO LONG.

TU1246EST

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS G-D SITUATION, DE?
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DUNNO. LOOKS PRETTY BAD.
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
A115LA
(HOLLYWOOD SHORTS—ADVANCE FOR SUNDAY AMS JUNE 18—THIRD ADD—XXX MOVIE PROFITS.)

HOLLYWOOD—(NPA)—NEWCOMER JOHN LYNN, WHO COULD BE A CONCERT PIANIST, RADIO STAR OR ACTOR IN THE LEGITIMATE THEATER—HE'S HAD OFFERS TO DO ALL THIS AND MORE—HAS DECIDED INSTEAD TO CONCENTRATE ON EMOTING FOR THE SCREEN. HIS NEXT PICTURE IS "CORRALLED", A WESTERN, SEQUEL TO "ROUNDUP", IN WHICH HE PLAYED THE TOUGH, HARD-BITTEN U. S. MARSHAL CLINT CODY. HE PORTRAYS CODY AGAIN IN "CORRALLED" WITH HIS HORSE "LIGHTNING" AND GLORIA SWANN AS HIS LEADING LADY.

YA950PST

SITUATION LOOKS BADDER YET FOR ME. I'M A CPO IN
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
NAVY RESERVE.
XXXXXXXXXXXX

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S'LONG CHIEF. NICE KNOWIN YA
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A SHORT LIFE AND HAPPY
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YOU AINT KIDDING
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IS THAT "BADDER" OR "BETTER"?
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WORSE. GOT A WIFE AND KID BUT NO DEFERMENT FROM
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RESERVE.
XXXXXXX
SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
I'M THINKING
XXXXXXXXXX
I DUNNO, THINK I'D LIKE TO TAKE A CRACK AT THOSE
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ROOSHKY'S MYSELF.
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
NOW'S UR CHANCE. JOIN NOW.
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
HUP—TWO—THREE—FOUR
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AMMO AND BLOOD!
XXXXXXXXXXXXX
DOWN IN THE MUD!
XXXXXXXXXXXXX
TO THE REAH HARCH!
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
SAY, AIN'T IT BOUT TIME FOR THIRTY?
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
JUS WAIT MINIT
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—17—
EDITORS

THIRTY ON NITE REPORT AAA. A1 NXT
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THE OUTLAWS

BY LEE PRIESTLEY

Here's a world of the future that's really a dilly. Too many people. Every inch of the globe crowded. So new slogans were invented, such as — Propagate At Your Own Peril—Have a Son and You're on the Run —Thou Shalt Not Beget. In short, No babies, bub!

ALL women are outlaws at heart. That should have been plain the first time I saw Clover. It was Vernal Season of last year, 3953. . . .

Miss Glotz, my secretary here at the Bureau, says the first quarter of the annum was called Spring two thousand years ago. I wouldn't know about history, for statistical mechanics is the field that makes me Assistant Chief of Population Control while the big boss is away on his frequent extermination expeditions.

What I did know was that Vernal Season set my toes to squirming and my brain to dreaming. I felt caged and, somehow, abused. With work of the first importance to do, I spent half my time staring out of the view spaces. The other half I used up aimlessly stirring the piled-up data on my desk. Miss Glotz usually puts up with me, being older and having a mother hen complex, but I got on her nerves.

"Conway," she snapped, looking peevishly over her vision correctors, "*Stop* twiddling! Either get to work or take a vacation, you big lug!"

I hung my legs over the arm of my couchair and set my hands behind my head. "Glotzy, I want to walk barefoot on cool, green grass."

Glotzy, patting the waves of her hair so black and unruffled I've wondered if she paints it on fresh every morning, looked startled. "Well, don't do it. The psychos would exile you to the power farms for sure."

"It might be nice to live

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where you could walk on grass. Even up at the windmill farms. Or anyplace two thousand years ago."

"Don't let anyone hear you talking like that," Glotzy cautioned me. "Being of the Ruler Race doesn't exempt you from trouble if your monitor reports you, remember."

It didn't worry me. It's true we each have a secret personal monitor to make sure we obey all laws and regulations. I cocked an eye at the heavy bronze plaque on my desk, given me for an absolutely clear, life-long record of law observance. What could my monitor report?

"Glotzy, did you ever think it might have been better back in the good old days?"

"There was more freedom. Why not, with only two thousand million people on earth? It wasn't necessary to plant every square inch with food or fuel crops as it is today with a population five times as great. One of the freedoms you're regretting," Glotzy added dryly, "was freedom to starve to death."

She was right. Actually, there was a time when no effort was made to limit population to numbers that could obtain an adequate diet. People bred at will, although a wise old boy named Malthus stated clearly that population exerted continual pressure on its means of subsistence with a miserable margin doomed to starve.

Now, we handle it better. Here in the Bureau we feed innumerable food supply factors into the statistical mechanics machines to learn how many people can probably be fed. When food supply curves, going up, cross death rates, a few babies are scheduled for birth. Central Control says how many and the Eugenics Council decides which matings will be allowed to become fruitful. Then the Bureau issues Permits to Reproduce accordingly. The best stocks for special abilities are chosen if clerk and worker matings are used while we of the Ruler Race are selected for highest unspecialized abilities so leaders will emerge.

Population control is important . . . and grim. Any serious mistake in calculations makes it necessary to euthanize whole cities. Lack of cooperation leads to ruthless extermination. I didn't have the stomach for such bloody business although the Chief seemed to enjoy it.

Glotzy had gone on thinking. "There could be more freedom two thousand years

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"You fool! It's suicide!"

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ago for the same reason there's more freedom at the power farms now. Fewer people . . . at the ends of the earth . . . without climate control and social manipulation that make life in this area so secure and comfortable—"

I yawned. "And so dull."

Glotzy didn't agree, but I thought she looked wistful for a moment. Then she got back on the job. "Con, have you been taking your placidity pills? Psych' sent down a second warning this morning. Your discontent index shows a sharp rise."

I made a rude noise. First they breed the Ruler Race for discontent because it gives us more drive and will to succeed; then they feed us pills to make us placid. Pills containing male and female hormones to soft pedal the sex urge . . . to take your mind off what you're missing. . . .

The door slid open, then, to admit a queue of clerks with bales and batches of fresh data. I knew I couldn't look another correction-of-yield sheet in its neat tabulations without being actively sick. I hopped up and shouldered into my tunic, giving a good performance as a harassed official urgently needed in three places at once.

"I'll be in early Monday, Miss Glotz. I've just remembered—Use your best judgement on anything that comes up," I said briskly. "We can't get a trial estimate until that Siberian wheat figure comes in—"

I avoided a direct look at Glotzy. Either women make good secretaries because they have more than a normal amount of extra sensory perception, or being secretaries develops ESP. Anyway, Glotzy often seems able to read my mind.

"The ancients called it 'Spring Fever'," she said, looking me over critically. "Much more descriptive term than the 'Vernal Syndrome' we use now." She picked a thread off my sleeve. "New tunic? I suppose you know the green is effective with your red hair?" She tipped a hand at me in a gesture of farewell. "Out with you, lad. Give the girls a treat."

I laughed and left. Glotzy wouldn't turn me in to Personal Efficiency. Far into her forties and not mated, she's made a strong emotional transference to me.

I hopped the slideway to the recreational areas, the sun warm on my shoulders and a soft wind ruffling my hair. I settled the new tunic and

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preened a bit when heads turned to watch me . . . especially girls' heads.

But I guess Psych' was right about my discontent index. I didn't spot a girl who suited me. Plenty of pretty ones. Small, slight, dark of eyes and hair, the standard type developed for best efficiency in any part of the world. This seemed a special kind of day; I wanted a special kind of girl.

I strolled through the zoo and the botanical garden—*not* walking on the sample grass plot. Then I decided to go on to the State Nurseries and look at the human young who would be sunning behind their germicidal barriers. I often went to look at the cute little cusses, but I seldom had much company, most people preferring the monkeys at the zoo. Maternal instinct is pretty well bred out of our women and paternal instinct comes after the child with most men.

So I caught Clover right in the middle of her kidnapping. A careless attendant had left an entry open or there'd been a power failure, so it was possible to get in with the kids. Clover not only got in with them; she got back out with one. When I saw her she was carrying a tiny infant in her arms.

There aren't many women like Clover left in the world now. She wore a blue tunic that day, the color of her eyes. *Blue* eyes! Gleaming yellow hair . . . a slim, tall body like marble warmed in the sun. (I believe the type was called blonde and was once fairly common before we tended to become brunette so we could live efficiently in both tropic and temperate climates.)

I stood half concealed in the shadow of some tall shrubbery and watched her approach, smiling down at the babe in her arms with a lovely yearning smile. She was close before she saw me. Then her eyes darkened to a stormy purple and clutching the child closer, she whirled to run. I caught her before she got away.

"Woman, are you insane?" I tightened my hands on her twisting shoulders.

She fought to escape me, handicapped by her care to protect the child. She kicked me, then butted and bumped with head and hips, I was hard put to it to hold her.

"Let me . . . go," she panted. In a fury, she turned in my hands and bit my thumb. Hard.

I yelped and turned her loose. She ran, but she didn't go far. She watched me, her

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blue eyes searching my face. Then she came back to me.

"I'm sorry," she said slowly. "I didn't intend to hurt you."

I looked at the marks of her teeth on my thumb. "It was mostly the surprise. I've never been bitten by a feral female before."

"Feral?"

"Well, wild and untamed at the very least. Who are you? What's your name?"

"Clover."

I saw that her blue eyes were almost level with mine and I'm tall. An unusual girl with an unusual name. Then I remembered what she'd done.

"Well, Clover, take that infant back to the nursery, but quick. You're lucky I'm the only one who saw you steal it."

She didn't answer, but she tightened her arms stubbornly around the babe. The little thing, undisturbed by our scuffle, stared up at her with wide, unwinking eyes. Then its tiny mouth parted in a wavering smile. The baby achieved a cooing sound.

"Oh, the darling!" Clover's smile was sweeter than the baby's. "It loves me already, the precious thing!"

I had trouble looking away from the heaving breasts where the baby lay so contentedly. "Merely contact with an erogenous zone." Then I asked myself what was mere about it. "Go on, now. Put the kid back."

"I won't! I've always wanted a baby. I'll take good care of it. There wasn't a soul minding it, poor neglected little scrap. I'll go away. No one will know where the baby's gone."

"How many will want to know where it came from?" I gave her a little shove toward the entry. "Go on. Take the baby back. Use your head, girl. You could dance naked in the Plaza and attract less attention than you would carrying that baby a block."

Clover's eyes brightened with unshed tears but she went back. When she put the baby down into its cradle, it pumped its arms and legs and mewed like an angry kitten. She was probably right that the kid loved her already and didn't want to leave her. It didn't take long . . . look at me! The baby doubled up minute fists and turned bright red. Then it let go with a heartbroken howl.

I hurried Clover away as two nursery attendants trotted through a doorway. When they saw us run through

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the unactivated barrier their alarm went into high decibels. Then sirens wailed from half a dozen posts.

We had to get away quick. I pulled Clover into the shrubbery belt. Then we dodged from bush to bush. Halfway out, she stopped so that I banged into her and nearly over ran her.

"Don't let them take me!" she whispered, her eyes wide and dark with fear as she clung to me.

I didn't get it at first, being too busy enjoying the result to be concerned about the cause. Then I caught sight of the patrolman, too. I held her closer and murmured soothingly.

"When we're a street or two away they can't pick us out of the crowd. The nurses saw only our backs. Don't be frightened. Only a lawbreaker needs fear the police."

She trembled under my hands. Really afraid . . . it followed that she had some reason to be. Only lawbreakers— To show you the state I was in, I didn't even ask what she'd done. More, I made myself an accessory . . . me, who hadn't so much as a traffic conviction against my record.

"Don't worry," I told her. "No one . . . nothing . . . is going to take you away from me."

The patrolman was coming in our direction now. He must not see Clover. I shoved her down under a thick bush and turned my back to the approaching officer.

"Hey, Citizen," he began as he came up behind me.

I didn't let the unlucky fellow get any further. I scooped his neck into the crook of my arm as I yanked his cap down over his eyes. Then I smacked him hard enough to keep him uninterested in any comings or goings for some hours.

We loitered in odd corners until dusk, then I smuggled Clover into my apartment. For the first time I felt uneasy about the automatic reporters and telltales that were surely scattered round the place. I hadn't worried about my monitor when there'd been only some thrownaway placidity pills to report. Now. . . .

But I didn't keep thinking about monitors. With the door closed safely behind us, Clover laid a hand upon my arm in a grateful gesture.

"Thank you, Con. If I may, I'll wait until it's really dark. Then I'll go. I don't want to make more trouble for you."

I pulled her into my arms, not wasting any more time.

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"Is this trouble, Clover? Then I want more of it."

I meant it. This wasn't just another girl to satisfy a mild urgency. This was a wild surging need with every cell of body and brain answering the clamant call that was Clover.

She came with reluctance. I had to get a hand under her chin before I could lift her face to kiss her. But after a moment her arms lifted to my neck. They tightened and clung when I lifted her and when I punched the light stud with an elbow. . . .

Clover's face, lost in the tumbled gold of her hair, was turned to the wall when I wakened. Up on an elbow, I parted the soft strands to kiss her. Tears tasted salt on her lips and her breath caught in a suppressed sob.

"Darling! Darling, don't cry." I heard my voice using words of endearment that I'd only read in books. "Clover, sweetheart, what's wrong? Tell me."

"Con. . . ." She turned to come into my arms. "Oh, Con, it's what you must think about me."

Think about Clover? Thought hadn't come into it. I tried to tell her how I felt about her. That took time.

She shook her head. "I'm not really this kind of woman, Con," she kept repeating.

I was puzzled. "What other kind is there?"

"To come to you like this—" Her voice trailed away and tears welled again in those incredible blue eyes.

"You're not sorry, Clover?"

"No . . . no, Con, I'm not sorry. But I should be! We aren't married—"

Married? I couldn't place the word. What was "Married"? I'd read it someplace . . . in a newstrip. I pulled mentally at the threads of association. Now I had it. Marriage was a lasting sex association. A race of intractables had practised marriage. Tall, blue-eyed blondes, they had a strong procreative instinct so that they consciously felt the need of children. They'd been exterminated or sent to the power farms as slave labor—I had one of those intractables in my bed.

"How did you get away, Clover?"

Her eyes darkened with the impact of my question and she shrank away from me pulling the light cover over her bare shoulders. "What . . . I don't know what you mean, Con."

"Never mind," I said. "I know how it must have been.

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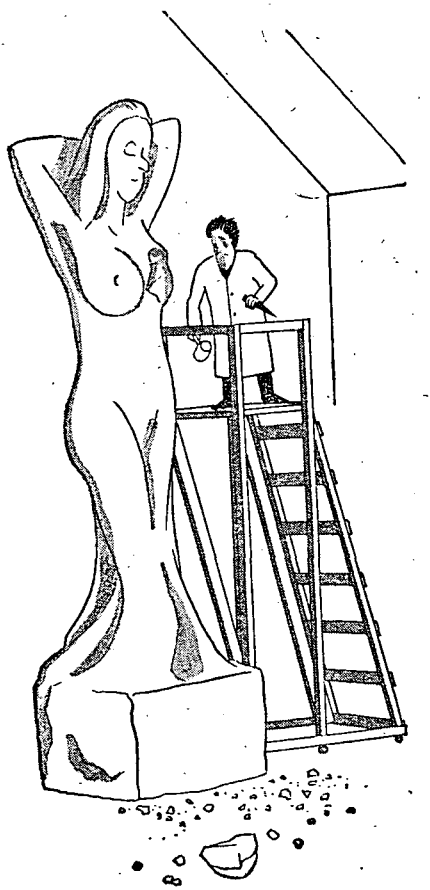
The exterminator squad couldn't kill you. No man could let so much beauty go to waste. So an officer set you aside for himself. I hope you got away in time."

"I did, Con. I bit him and ran."

I looked at the marks of her teeth still showing on my thumb. "You bit me, too, baby. How come you didn't run?"

Clover looked up at me. Then her lashes veiled the message of her eyes. But that blue glance sent the clamant call pulsing through my veins again. She didn't run from



"Oops—!"

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me at that time, either. . . .

Next day I went out to the suburbs where I'd heard of an old blind religious. When I found him I took him to the apartment along with an old book containing a marriage ceremony. We prompted him on the nearly forgotten words he couldn't see. And so we were married. It didn't make any difference to me, but Clover was happier and that made me happy.

On Monday at the office I tried to act like a man who had spent an ordinary weekend. But I didn't fool Glotzy. She watched me sort crop yield estimates into the wrong baskets for a while. Then she took the papers out of my hands and filed them correctly. Finished, she sat down in the other couchair and looked at me over her vision correctors. I'd have loved to lay her out flat.

"All right, Con," she said when she had me sweating. "Give."

"What are you talking about, Glotzy?" I tried to bluster. "And stop glowering at me over those goggles! Why don't you get a proper fit, instead of peering around the things like a cat behind a chair? Before long, you'll need a cane and a cup."

"What have you been up to? And tell *all*. Tell it from start to finish."

I could lie to Glotzy . . . or I could try to. But I didn't. "You should see her," I wound up. "But I cut off the teleview before I left the apartment. Couldn't risk any unexpected—"

Glotzy put out a hand to one of the wall panels. "We could use my—"

I wasn't listening. I was deep in a mental picture of Clover as I had left her. Rosy and relaxed, her lashes lifted over her blue eyes when I kissed her and she had pulled me close to the sleepy rise and fall of her breast, as contented as a child.

I came out of my dream. "What were you saying, Glotzy?"

"Never mind. Let's go over to your apartment. You can trust me, Con. And you'll need some help if you intend to keep this girl."

"Keep her? I certainly am." In my mind I heard myself repeating after the old blind religious, "till death do us part." I'd really meant that promise.

Clover and Glotzy took to each other at first sight. After her first open mouthed stare, Glotzy found Clover's blonde

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beauty a challenge to her ingenuity. She studied Clover with deep concentration.

"Make this girl inconspicuous? Ha! It's a shame to hide that hair but otherwise she wouldn't be safe a minute. I do know a bit about dyes." In an absent minded association of ideas, Glotzy smoothed her too-black locks. "She can wear contact lenses when she goes out. There's nothing to be done about her height except heelless sandals and tunics with stripes going around. You'll have to be a homebody, Clover. Functioning as a glamour gal is out."

Clover smiled at us. "I won't mind. And when the babies begin to come, I'll be too busy." She gazed into space with stars in her eyes.

We stared at her with our mouths ajar. I gulped like a fish out of water.

"Babies!" Glotzy yelped. "Plurals she's got!" Then she said more quietly. "No gromlin tea, I suppose."

"Gromlin what?" Clover was puzzled.

"Pills and hormones and injections have all been tried for birth control," Glotzy explained, "but the simplest and best is a kind of tea brewed from gromlin, a small shrub of the forget-me-not family. Navajo Indian women used it as much as two thousand years ago. If you drink a measure daily—" Glotzy added dryly, "Lecturing you about birth control methods now seems to me to be slightly academic."

Glotzy looked at me. Her gaze was level and noncommittal but I knew what was in both our minds. In a society without food for a single uncalculated soul, infanticide is a matter of course. Life isn't sacred in an overcrowded world. The slant on propagation changed plenty in two thousand years.

Glotzy got to her feet. "Let's begin, Clover. Although you're young and far too beautiful to dye."

Clover with her hair dyed black was still beautiful but no longer startling. At least the first person who saw her wouldn't denounce her as one of the intractables. It seemed safe to settle back into a happiness like nothing I had ever known. A happiness springing from solid love and devotion.

I'd had my share of girls but this was so different you couldn't even use the same words. Nights when Clover lay asleep in my arms I tried to be logical about it but I

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only knew that what we had between us was right. This was why sex was built into our bodies . . . this was creative living. This was rising to our destiny.

It was on a night like that I made up my mind. I slid carefully out of bed so Clover wouldn't waken. I dressed in the dark and went out. The moon shone with a cold white light that twined every object with a shadowy mirror image. I hurried along close to building and wall with a furtiveness I had never before felt. But I had never before set out to break the highest law of the land either.

At the Bureau a watchman, half asleep and completely uninterested, let me through the bronze doors. I met no one, but I felt that I was not alone in the silent corridors. In my office the cushions of my couchair were warm to the touch as if someone had been sitting there. Probably a watchman hiding out to snatch forty winks.

First I issued a Permit to Reproduce to Clover and me. As Acting Chief I had a right to do that *if* a baby were scheduled. I was first on the list of eugenically approved males so my marriage would be chosen *if* I mated with a girl from a similar list. But I broke the law when I added one to the estimated number that could be fed and when I permitted my mating with an unauthorized female to become fruitful. But I might get away with it. The Chief wasn't due back for some time and he took far more interest in extermination missions than in records.

I didn't regret my fall from grace. When I climbed back into bed Clover made a drowsy cooing sound and tucked her head under my chin. Until I went to sleep I thought over schemes to avoid sending the baby to the State Nurseries. . . .

But the Chief came back sooner than I had hoped. One morning when the last leaves scudded before a cold wind, I opened my office door to find him sprawled in my couchair.

"Don't look so happy to see me, Con," he said with a loud guffaw. Then he glanced at the clock. "Better get here earlier tomorrow, too. Of course, when the cat's away the mice will play. The cat, by the way, had himself a time. Good hunting, very." His grin twisted into a reminiscent leer. "The prettiest one got away but there were plenty others. Well, now I'm

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here I might as well dictate some letters. Send in that old hag of yours, Con. What's her name . . . Clocks? Tomorrow I'll find me a real looker."

I went out and catching Glotzy's eye I motioned over my shoulder. "The hero's home from the wars. Take a letter, Miss Glotz."

Glotzy said a bad word under her breath. She went into the office with her nose indicating a bad smell in the near vicinity. She blames herself for bringing things to a head and, possibly, her attitude did needle the Chief into a resentful activity. But it would have happened sooner or later.

Looking for something to criticise, the Chief went through Glotzy's neat files like a chimpanzee in a pantry. It was pure chance that one handful brought out the Permit to Reproduce issued to me.

"Whatta you know?" He stared at the form. "Con's breeding a brat! Wonder if I know the girl?" Then he shook his head over Clover's name. "The classy dames don't chase Con like they do me—"

He flipped through the thin sheaf of Permits. Then he caught a name. His face purpled and he let out a roar that brought me loping.

"What goes on here? High time I got back! Con, do you figger to corner the kid supply?"

In either hand he held Permits to Reproduce . . . identical Permits . . . both made out to Clover and me!

Had I broken the sternest law of our society when we were being scheduled to have our child with the sanction of the State? That would be irony—Of course not, all Permits went through my hands and Glotzy's.

Glotzy, too! That moonlit night when I had fraudulently issued *one* of those Permits . . . when my couchair had been warm from an earlier occupant. . . . Glotzy had forged another Permit. See what I mean about women being outlaws at heart?

The Chief eyed me grimly. "Start explaining, Conway. And you'd better make it good. I'm not at the top of the eugenics list, but I'm bright enough to know the Council doesn't designate one mating twice—"

Clover was the interruption. She came flying through the door, talking as she came.

"Con, oh Con, darling! We're going to have twins! The doctor says he can hear

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two heartbeats! I'm so excited I had to—"

Clover's breath ran out and she saw the Chief at the same time. She had been excited. She'd forgotten to wear the contact lenses that darkened her eyes. She must have been washing her hair before another dye job, too, for the scarf she'd tied over it slipped now to show damp yellow tendrils.

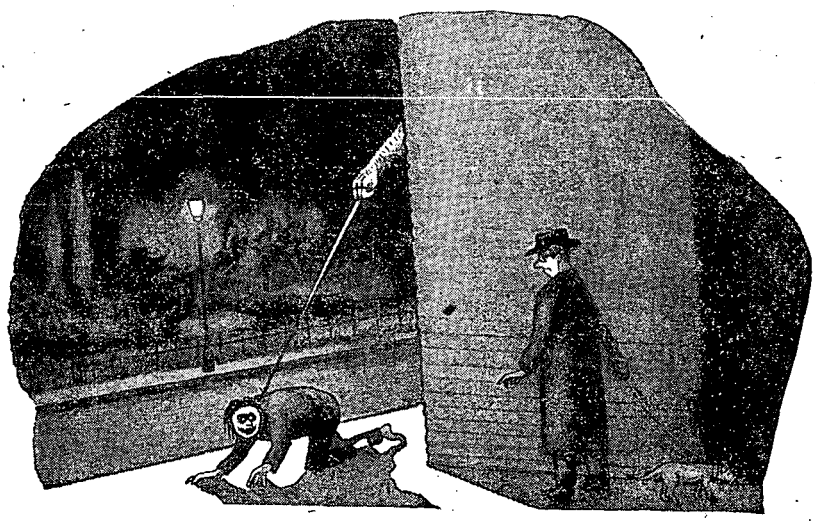
But excitement couldn't account for the way she reacted to sight of the Chief. Her blue eyes widened with shock and defiance. She blanched until the faint, beguiling powder of freckles showed on her cheek bones. She shrank back, feeling blindly for the doorway.

The Chief frowned at her, like a man in search of an elusive memory. Then he sprang up to bar her way to the door.

"Just . . . a minute . . ." He spaced the words while he searched her face. Then his hand snaked out to rip off the scarf. Clover's long bright hair tumbled about her shoulders. The Chief yelped like a dog cornering a rabbit.

"The pretty one that got away! This time—"

I hit him. Hard. So hard he bounced off the iron brain of the statistical mechanics machines with a noise like a dropped melon. I think he was dead before he hit the floor, but he certainly was after



"Down, boy!"

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Glotzy's contribution. She hit him with the heavy bronze plaque snatched from my desk . . . the plaque given me for an absolutely clear record as a law abiding servant of the State.

Nobody said anything. Clover shuddered in my arms, her face hidden. Glotzy felt blindly for my couchair and sank into it. Finally I got my tongue and brain coordinated.

"Clover, you and Glotzy start now. I'll delay as long as I can. Maybe you can get over the borders before my monitor turns me in. Make for the power storage areas. Maybe the windmill farms." I closed my mind to the certainty that two women alone couldn't get so far. "Hurry, there's no time to lose!"

"Wait, Con." That was Glotzy. "With that—" she looked distastefully at the huddled body on the floor" "—out of the way. . . . You have two Permits, you know."

Clover and I stared at Glotzy, hope dawning in our minds. With the Chief gone, I'd be in charge of the Bureau. With two Permits, Clover could have the twins. Then I saw the stumbling block. I shook my head.

"My monitor. He's probably watching us on a secret microscreen now—"

"Like this, Con?"

Glotzy had reached to flip a switch concealed someplace in the paneling. A small square slid aside and a microview of my apartment appeared on a tiny screen.

"You really never guessed?" Glotzy grinned at me. "Maybe *I'm* mistaken about you being an able citizen that the State was mistakenly denying progeny! But I intend to be a reasonable facsimile of a grandmother and dead or alive the Chief's not going to stop me!"

I don't even know where the body's buried. Glotzy took care of everything. Now she's working on a plan to escape to the windmill farms where the pressure of population isn't so great. We can't stay here much longer. Clover will never agree to turn our twins over to be reared by the State.

There's another factor, too. No doubt about it, Clover has a strong procreative instinct that feels the direct need of children. And when that clamant call pulses in my veins, I'm not apt to remember that there won't be any more Permits to Reproduce.

But Clover and Glotzy will come up with something. All women are outlaws at heart.

THE END

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Are you one of the optimists who believes that as time goes on people get better and better? Do you see the future as a time when no man will stoop to such things as beating his wife or kicking his dog? Do you see an end of violent death? Then read—

THE MURDER-CON

BY JEROME BIXBY

I

LETTER to William J. Burton, Chicago insurance agent, and executive assistant to the Secretary of the North American branch of the Contact and Recruiting Division of the Society of World Telepaths:

Sept. 6, 1955

Dear Bill, . . .

Had myself a terrific time at the 13th World Science Fiction Convention in New York. I never dreamed it would be so exciting, or so much fun. I met a lot of my favorite authors and artists, and collected autographs galore . . . I know you probably think that's silly, but remember I'm just a little comelately fem-fan, while you've been reading the stuff since Kinnison was a pup, and are an old cynic besides.

Most of all I enjoyed meeting Fred van Voorhis. You know I've always admired his stories more than any others, and I was so thrilled to meet him and see what he was like. So (shudder) I guess you can imagine how *horrified* I was at what happened to him . . .

. (The code of the Society of World Telepaths is almost impossible to explain to anyone except a telepath. It involves semantic principles which the Computer at Society Headquarters in Los Angeles predicts will not be understood by non-telepaths until the year 2240. Suffice it to say, this letter was in code. Uncoded, it read:)

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He screamed as the glass splintered.

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. . . thanks again for wangling me the assignment to cover the Convention this year. Masterson was telling me last year what a charge he got out of wandering around among those minds, and I can only echo loudly. Never been so stimulated in my life . . . a bunch of really high-powered brains, imagination on the loose, even if some of them are neurotic as jaybirds. I can understand the Society sending someone around to cover the Con each year . . . loads of top-secret dope from the Scientific Brains who attend, some new angles for our own research projects, and always a top chance of running into someone ripe for recruiting. My formal report on what I picked up has gone to the General Council—we may have a lot of it already from the spotters assigned to the Big Brains who were there—but where else can you get such a boiled-down, general, capsule picture of what's new (or just around the corner) in science? One thing in particular—Harvey, the biologist, was carrying around a bit of dope that Loder in Florida can use to speed up his diabetes research. Harvey didn't know what to do with it—but when we feed it to Loder (Eureka, inspiration, out of the blue!) it may turn a trick. Also, Willey had a subconscious notion on fuels that might be hypoed into that boy up in Quebec—but for God's sake we'd better keep it away from White Sands, what with our extrapolations for the next decade if they hit 2,000 miles this year. And . . . MacCreigh had a buried idea, tangent to a story he was plotting, that'll turn Sociology on its ear and maybe change our planning in Africa a lot, if Psychology and Ethics approve . . . and . . . well, all this is in my report, and now the selection, the channeling, the implanting or suppression of it is up to the GC. I sometimes wonder what shape the world would be in, Bill, without the Society around to keep an eye out—to spot ideas, boost them, erase them, transplant them, goose research, selectively delouse dangerous minds, etc . . . ten times as messed up as it is, I suppose, though that isn't saying much. We can't slap down *all* the menaces (even if we could recognize them all), and only the General Council and the Computer know why we slap where we slap and stay our distance elsewhere . . . and we don't question that, salaam. The

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Computer says 2400 will be a sane century . . . for that, I'll take orders any time.

About van Voorhis . . . I got the shock of my life when I found that he was a latent. I've spotted latents before—when I worked in Contact with you I even helped lift a few up to Awareness—those we wanted. But I've never stumbled across one like van Voorhis before—a potential A-plus, as powerful as five Bs like me, with his Awareness boiling away like crazy just under the conscious level—and with a character index so snake-belly low that we couldn't use him in a million years! Quite a combination. It first hit me when I was introduced to him, at the penthouse party—his mind came at me like a billygoat. He undressed me with it, and gave me the business—bing, bam, thank you, ma'am, all in a second or so. A gal gets used to that, of course—but I got it with A-plus force, and almost jumped a foot.

After I got away from him, I probed him from a distance—he felt it and didn't like it, but he didn't know what it was, of course. I probed, and tagged him as A-plus, teetering on the verge of Awareness . . . he was so close to Awakening that I thought any minute he'd let out a yell, "My God, I'm a telepath!" Or else he'd keep his mouth shut until it soaked in, and then he'd start fooling around, testing his power, pushing people around a little, maybe killing someone he didn't like with a mindblast or casing for his first million in blackmail . . . that was if he was smart. If he wasn't, he'd spill the works. Either way, he was dangerous — and to me particularly—because if he Awoke he'd find my mind instantly, like a sound in stillness—he'd probe right past any B blocks I could set up, and in half a second he'd know everything there was to know about telepathy on Earth. And then he wouldn't want the Society—meaning me, at the time—to know about *him*. Which would make me the target for everything he could throw.

Well, I stayed my distance and probed deeper, just touching his mind and then retreating, trying not to stir up his growing Awareness. I found out that he was a tomcat from way back—he wanted women more than anything, and treated 'em rough (I traced that back for the hell of it—naturally, it was

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Mama, who'd walked out on Papa and baby—so she had to be punished forevermore, while Papa was deified); and since he could just as much as command women to lie down, he was a terror. Also, his latent power accounted partly for his success as a writer—bad stories were bought right along with the good ones simply because he wanted to sell them, and were liked by readers because he wanted it that way—you know how an A-plus can broadcast on the general band—our own esteemed Society member of Hollywood and TV fame is *the* example, eh? Even people van Voorhis had been a perfect bastard to couldn't help liking him—because he liked to be liked, and as much as ordered it.

Oh, he had good qualities, of course—who doesn't? He was chahming and widdy, and he could be generous, if Papa's ghost wasn't looking. But a long latency corrupts—you go psycho under the onslaught unless you have a stainless steel character, and van Voorhis certainly didn't: underneath it all was an immature, selfish, dangerous mind, with an A-plus telepathic potential—and the whole works seething toward Awareness.

I probed into that, and that's when I *really* got a shock, Bill. You'll get a fac of my report, but let me tell you anyway—van Voorhis had built up, from stray thoughts he'd picked up here and there ever since his Awareness first started to rumble, a complete picture of the Society setup as it exists today throughout the world! He didn't know how he'd come by the idea, of course—writer's inspiration, he thought when it finally surfaced—and maybe only a writer *could* have fit it all together. But it was there, *all* of it—a breakdown on our personnel and methods in a dozen governments, in the U. N., the church, industry, education, organized science, everything! Even a lot of the names were right—names he'd never heard of consciously. Every ounce of observable evidence had been put together just as it is, and he'd fitted in all the "missing" pieces — "missing" because they tell the story if you dovetail them with the rest, but if you don't you'd never dream they could form part of such an organization. Bill, the picture he had was dynamite! . . . it was as plain as a complete jigsaw puzzle . . . in the hands of any government on

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Earth it would have set off an investigation with a roar. He had picked it up and stuck it together—and it was only because he was a writer, accustomed to wallowing in his own ingenuity, that he hadn't gotten around yet to consciously regarding it as possible fact. But unconsciously he knew it for fact, believe me—it was bouncing back and forth in his mind like a caged tiger. And 1) he'd written down every last fact in his little black notebook, and was going to put it all into a story . . . and 2) the knowledge had helped stir him up to within an inch of Awareness! (That last had happened fast—just in a couple of weeks—which probably accounts for no one's having spotted him before me.)

Bill, the situation scared me so much I let out a yowl for help that would have lifted the hair of any telepath in the hotel. But no one answered. Only van Voorhis picked it up, and it just made him edgier, though he didn't know what it was—you know how it is with latents: everything they pick up from outside they think comes from inside. When I yelled for help, van Voorhis felt suddenly that *he* was in danger and needed help.

He was drunk as a hootowl that night, and I thank God for that—it kept his analytical powers way down. So did the party atmosphere—lots of racket, and plenty of women for him to prance and whinny in front of. But every time I probed him I could see that growing Awareness boiling away, and I could feel all the suspicion and unease in him, and once or twice he even unconsciously blocked a little—unconsciously, but an A-plus block, and I had to get out fast or get burned. On the surface he was his usual hell-raising, high-life self . . . but underneath . . . any minute . . .

So there I was—one lone B stacked against an A-plus on the verge of realizing his powers. I wished more than ever that I was an A— in his pre-Aware state I could have stripped him and left him an amnesiac. But as a B, I could hardly dent him. And if he Awoke suddenly, he'd find my mind, probe me, see that I was a menace to his new-found state (if only because I knew about him and could sic the Society on him) and I'd get a mindblast. If he Awoke, I was *dead.*

Bill, I wanted to clear out of there fast—and if I'd had only the possibility that he

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would suddenly realize his powers and start plotting to capitalize on them to worry about, I would have. The Society could handle him once I reported him. But there were greater dangers—there was that damned notebook—I couldn't let that float around in this sea of smart cookies. And there was the possibility that he'd start blatting the whole works instead of keeping his mouth shut . . . and with the array of facts he had to back him up, he could have set an avalanche in motion in five minutes. There was even the possibility that he'd just start killing people—he was loaded with grudges, that one. The kind of a guy who didn't miss any bets.

The second was the worst, of course: the secrecy of the Society comes before anything and everything else . . . the whoop and holler about unGodly monsters and Military Security and Personal Privacy and Free Will that would touch off if we became known would drive us right off the Earth—particularly if they found out all the horrors that we deliberately *haven't* taken steps to prevent. Van Vogt knew what he was doing when he wrote SLAN . . . and I hope the Computer had known what it's doing, too . . .

Anyway, I stuck. And I was never so scared in my life.

As soon as I could, I'd phone the local Society HQ in New York, and a couple of As would come galloping to take over. But in the meantime . . . if van Voorhis Awoke . . .

Article IX, Section XIV of the Society Emergency Code was written across my mind in ten-foot letters—

In the interests of the Society, I was automatically authorized to kill Fred van Voorhis. At my discretion. Or try.

If he Awoke, and did the wrong thing.

And me just a B.

In other words, I had to stick around, "in the interests of the Society," because he was liable to Awake—and if he did, I could kill him "at my discretion," while he was doing his A-plus best to kill me. I'd have to brain him with a chair or something, right in front of everybody—if I could do it before I got a mindblast.

Oh, it was suddenly a lovely evening, Bill.

About that time I got another jolt—van Voorhis' Awareness took another step upward toward the conscious

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level, and what he knew subconsciously as fact rubbed hard against what he regarded consciously as story material, and he thought: *"Telepathy."*

I just froze, waiting for my mindblast.

"Telepathy . . . man, that's a helluva story . . . a Society like that, behind the scenes . . . and it all fits in so beautifully! van Voorhis, sometimes you amaze me . . . wonder what dear old Peter would say to it all . . . he was a bug on parapsychology in college . . ."

I relaxed a little—he was still thinking in terms of "story."

He paused, and thought startledly: "Peter! . . . by God, I *wonder!"*

I relaxed more—he was off on another tack, and his Awareness had subsided a little. Just a little.

"That other damn convention at this hotel . . . bunch of brat doctors . . . why didn't I think of it before! I wonder if he *is* here . . . well, let's toddle over to that damn old phone and find out, eh, van Voorhis? I'll just throw this whole idea at him and see what he thinks . . . by God, what a yarn . . . never had one eat me out so much—never had one hit me so hard before . . . terrific, the way it all works in . . . good old Peter, it'll knock him off his feet . . ."

And that's how Pete Farrel got dragged into the thing. God had set up a spare: Pete Farrel *had* come to the other convention; van Voorhis' A-plus field had picked him up; "Peter Farrel" had seeped up to van Voorhis' conscious mind; and now a phone call.

And *thank* God.

II

THE bellboy put my three suitcases on the floor beside the bed and said, "Anything else, Mr. Farrel?"

"No, thanks," I said.

He then astound me by informing me, out of the corner of his mouth, that I could enjoy the services of a young lady—a "slick, clean kid" was the way he put it, and matter of factly too—for twenty dollars, payable in advance. Evidently some of the things I'd heard about New York's classier hotels were true. I wondered if I had the lean and hungry look, or whether this was s. o. p. with out-of-town males who wore hombergs.

"That kind of luxury," I said, "I will leave to my

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wealthier patients, of whom there are regrettably-not half enough. But thanks for thinking of me."

I gave him a quarter, branding myself as *bourgeois* or a pinch-penny, both of which I am, and then had to close the door myself. Exercise is good for the soul.

I glanced at my watch. Quarter of six. Plenty of time for a leisurely dinner in the hotel dining room and a stroll through the Grand Central district before turning in. Maybe even a steam bath and rubdown. I was stiff from nine hours' driving.

I unstrapped my bags and dumped shirts, socks and underwear into a bureau drawer. I hung the suits I'd brought in the closet, and whisked my hands down the trousers to start a hundred little creases on their way out of the Orlon. I carefully arranged my toilet articles along the shelf under the mirror in the bathroom.

Then I scowled at my doctor's bag, which I had put on the bed. I hadn't intended bringing it to New York with me. But like many doctors, I had the habit of leaving it in my car between calls, and there it had been when I'd started my trip and here it was now—slightly a responsibility, because of the narcotics it contained. In Sioux City you can trust your car door, your garage door and, for the most part, the local inhabitants. But I'm damned if I'll trust a car door, or much of anything else, in New York.

Still scowling at the bag, I started for the telephone.

And then I stopped short in the middle of the room—

Because the phone simply hadn't rung . . . and there was nobody I wanted to call . . . and I didn't have the slightest idea on Earth why I'd started for it.

I scowled harder, stuck the bag under the bed, and was shaving when the phone rang.

The first thing I heard when I picked up the receiver was music—piano and guitar. And voices singing, and laughter, and loud yadety-yakety and the clinking of glasses. Funny, how brittle a party sounds over the phone; it doesn't roar, it squawks.

"Hello, Peter?" a man's voice said. "Peter, is that you, old thing?"

"This is Peter Farrel," I said, wondering who the devil it could be. It hadn't been five minutes since I'd checked in. The voice was familiar, but I couldn't get it very well

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across the unholy racket in the background.

Evidently the noise wasn't any help at the other end, either. "Hello, hello, *hello?*" the voice said. "Speak up, God damn it! Is this Doctor Peter Farrel's room? Hello, is that *you,* Peter?"

A blob of shaving-lather was drying behind an ear, a sensation which I detest. "This is Doctor Peter Farrel," I said in a steely voice, "speaking."

"*Pe-e*-eter!" I winced and moved the receiver away a couple of inches. "Peter, you old plumber of *derrieres,* you damned well-digger, you extractor from ill-advised females of poor, innocent, squawling infants into this cold cruel world, how are you, old os, this is Van!"

"Well, for the love of God," I said. "I should have known, from the glass-and-bottle toccata." I sat down on the edge of the bed, transferred the lather from the ear to a finger, and then wondered where it went from there. Van, of all people—Fred van Voorhis, master of Martians, vendor of Venusians, chronicler of thrilling adventures in time and space, Sioux City's gift to science fiction. . . . I'd gone to Iowa State with Van, back when he was a chemistry major and sane, and had kept track of his career down the years (only because I liked him, and had an academic interest in how long his liver would hold out; I don't especially enjoy science fiction). I'd seen him off and on. He was one of those people who just pop up—like now. If you were around, somehow he'd find you.

"Is this the same party," I inquired, "that I left you at the last time I was in town?"

I hadn't seen Van in two years, but he ignored the crack. "Peter, you old snipper of umbilicals, guess where I am!"

"Where?"

"Guess."

"The Vatican?"

"Oh, go on, *guess*—" he hiccupped, and in the phone it sounded like a kid's popgun—"where am I?"

"I," I said, "haven't got the faintest idea."

"Right here!"

"Right where, for God's sake? Will you stop being coy?"

"In the hotel—the Marlin! Up in the penthouse. I am at present, considering the fact that you're in room 907, exactly three hundred and thirty-six feet from you, and I can smell you being dignified from here! Wait'll I

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check on the nearest slipstick—"

His voice moved away from the phone, and I heard a faint feminine squeal. He came back. "Three hundred and thirty-*seven* feet, and six inches above the knee. M'm, good!"

Dear old Van. I wondered if she'd slapped him cockeyed. Probably not. Van was one of those good-looking devils—always reminded me of Hammett's description of Sam Spade: a blond Satan—and his success with women was simply phenomenal, a wonder to behold. It had made me (and a lot of other guys) slightly jealous back in college, when we were all studying extracurricular biology—I'd chase a girl for a month, wine her and dine her and maybe get nowhere in a hurry, and then Van would come along and melt her heels into a perfect 30° curve first try. He had what you might call "round toes," I guess, and they surely got worn that way. Me, I was never a slick chaser—though my libido is by no means wailing through bars.

"Dahling," Van said, like Talu, "we've simply got to get together. When I heard there was a convention of obstrepericians in the hotel, I called the desk, and there in room 907 was good old—"

"The word," I said, "is obstetrician, you oaf. The American Society of Obstetrics."

"Hell, I know the word. Neologism, old thing. It's a lousy racket. I'm ashamed of you, really, Peter. Hasn't one of the little creatures ever looked up at you with big, sad eyes and said, 'But I did not *want* to come out?' Have you ever had the decency to *ask?* My God, it's heartbreaking! I think you're a perfect bastard, Peter. Why couldn't you stick to something respectable, like removing bullets from gentlemen on the lam? You'd make more money, and—"

"Only once," I said.

"Once what?"

"Only once was I reprimanded by a baby. It complained I had cold hands."

"What in *hell* are you talking about?"

"Nothing," I said wearily. Van was too damned drunk to be aware of anybody else's gags.

"Rotten racket, Peter. Get out of it before it's too late. Oh, I admit I like the terrain you work on, but by the time you get to it, it's *nicht.* You take things *out*—"

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A blast of laughter came over the phone, and the piano made thumped-with-fists noises.

"Van," I asked, "just what the devil is going on up there? Who's renting the place—Bacchus?"

"I am attending," he said, "the Nyawkon."

"The *what?*"

"The 1955 World Science Fiction Convention, the same being an annual gathering of writers, editors, artists, Eminent Scientists and strange grubby little creatures called fans, who make much ado about science fiction though God knows why, half of them don't have the brains to dig the stuff and the other half never gets around to reading it—"

Inspired, I had gotten rid of the lather on the edge of an ashtray. "I didn't know you science fiction people held conventions. What do you do—fly around in spaceships and swap story ideas?"

Van shrieked. "God in Heaven, *me* part with an *idea?* Pearls before hacks? Peter, the very thought fills me with—"

I interrupted him, wishing he wouldn't overact so. It can be funny. It can also be exasperating. "All right, what *does* go on, then?"

. . . scared me, Bill, when van Voorhis reacted too strongly to the mention of story ideas. But it didn't mean much — just some steam escaping where the mention touched his mental state regarding his "story idea" and heated it up for a second. I'm glad Pete cut him off—van Voorhis' Awareness didn't have a chance to wiggle—not when the conscious van Voorhis had a chance to parade his favorite glib, witty, cynical dramatization.

I kept listening to the conversation, just touching van Voorhis' mind.

"Item one," Van said: "the fans come creeping from all corners of the country to attend lectures and debates and panel discussions in which pros, yclept professionals in the field, toss around matters scientific and science fictional. Also there is entertainment: musical, humorous, dramatic and otherwise . . . God save me from such entertainment! Item two: every damned pro who isn't performing for the fans goes up to one or another of the rooms in this great, big, wonderful hotel and kills half a bottle, then seeps down to appear on exhibit while the pros who just went through said ordeal

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come up and kill the other half. They are joined in this fascinating procedure by certain select fans of voting and consenting age, whilst stumbling over myriad other grimy little specimens who have crashed seeking proximity to their godheads. we've hired the big hall—the ballroom—what *is* the name of the goddammed thing, Peter?—"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Anyway, that's where the intellectual crap and what passes for entertainment transpire. But, ah—it is in the little rooms, the secret rooms, the locked rooms guarded jealously by eunuchs —are there *really* such creatures, Peter? . . . no *wonder* they're jealous—that the real gemutlich transpires!"

"That sounds," I said, "just about like any other convention."

"Only twice as much," he said. "This science fiction crowd can raise more hell, kill more bottles and drop more panties than bank night in le shack Sade." He paused. "Peter, by God, come on up here and join us. Now *there's* a thought. You get your tuckus right on up here, and I'll invent a drink for the occasion —call it 'The Mutant's Paw': six fingers of Scotch—"

I said, "Definitely not. I've just had nine hours at the wheel, I just checked in and I'm tired. I am the original worn and weary traveler. From the sounds I hear, two minutes in that den of hyenas would drive me into the woodwork. If you want to have a quiet drink, I will happily meet you in the bar downstairs—I suppose there is one, isn't there?—"

"My God, yes, man." He sounded hurt. "This is New York."

"Okay. I will see you there. If not, let's wait till anon. Under no conditions will I venture one step toward your present locale."

He didn't bleat objections, which surprised me a little. Van is the type to rush into your bathroom, drag you out of the shower, wind a towel around you if he can find one and haul you into the living room to see all the wonderful people he brought along. I had expected him to insist that I come on up here, goddamn it, old os. But he lowered his voice and said, "Okay, Peter, old os." (At least that had been forthcoming.) "I'll meet you in the bar in—" a watch-glancing pause—"fifteen minutes. Tell you the truth, there's a little matter I want

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to talk to you about. Maybe you can give me a hand—"

"What's it all about?" I asked skeptically. A hand. I could imagine. A hand with green stuff in it. *Peter, can you spare fifty or a hundred for a bit? I've got a check coming.* I resigned myself to the touch. It was inevitable. Kismet. Van never failed, every time I saw him. And he never paid up, but somehow you didn't mind—you couldn't help liking the guy, even when he pulled the rottenest tricks on you.

"It'll wait," he said mysteriously. Have you ever heard someone who's potted to the ears being mysterious? It's a damned silly sound. "It'll wait . . . the walls have ears." Pause. "You know . . . funny thing, I feel right *now* almost as if someone . . ."

. . . a close thing, Bill, believe me. All his discomfiture over his "story idea," compounded by his general jealousy regarding story ideas, had suddenly tossed up a block—and the block burned me like hell before I could get out of his mind, and he felt me there for a second.

I threw up every block I had, and got close enough to hear the rest of van Voorhis' side of the conversation aurally. I could see, even without reading him, that his Awareness was stirred up . . . telepathy was on his mind again, but good . . .

"All right," I said. "Fifteen minutes. Now get off the phone and let me finish shaving." And I started to hang up.

"Peter," he said, and suddenly his voice was a little different—for the first time I heard strain in it—a sort of thin, ugly tone: "Peter, do you remember those bull-sessions we used to have in college about te—"

Then I heard a yelp over the phone, and a noise like a chair being knocked over. The receiver banged, then rattled as it was picked up again. Van said, "It jumped! Son of a bitch, the floor *jumped!*" Pause, while Van got his comedy mask back on: "Avast, you scoundrels, must I sit here all night like a moose in heat? . . . Ah, thank you, my dear—you are a good girl for helping me up, and for being that, I won't goose you, though I am in a position to administer a masterpiece . . . hello, Peter?"

"Yes," I said tiredly. "How much have you had to drink, Van?"

"This is the second day of

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the convention," he said proudly, "and I am the proud father of three empty bottles, not counting pints."

"My God," I said.

"I'm not drunk, though," he objected. "The god-dammed *floor* shook. First earthquake New York's had in years—I must remember to buy a paper tomorrow. Look, Peter, allow me to introduce you to a very lovely chick—she just scraped me up off the floor, and I tell you man to man, she's one little girl I haven't been able to climb this Con. Of course, that's because I've only known her for ten minutes—"

"Don't be an utter boor," I snarled. "Is she listening to all this? Have a little—"

"But, Peter—she *knows* me. She's a fan of mine and loves me dearly. She doesn't mind. Do you, you gorgeous thing with things—" there was a pause. I had visions of Van's big hand eeling toward some succulent portion of the lady's anatomy, whoever she was. "No," he said mildly, a moment later. "No, indeed. I almost made a boo boo. This is a kid you don't fool with. This is a kid you respect, and I do. You know what? She doesn't retreat when you fire—she just looks at you, and *awk*, baby, it's cold inside—"

. . . when he started to yap about telepathy, Bill, he was about five seconds away from Awakening . . . I could see it building, like spotlights, flickering along the underside of his consciousness. Maybe his scaring me out of his mind a second before had done it—I'd left a trail, and he'd chased me up it a couple of levels. Anyway, I felt that the shooting match was just about on.

So I jolted him—it was my one chance. I mindpushed him, hard enough so that he hit the floor, and at the same time I let him see about six inches of thigh, because I was pretending to pull up a stocking. Then I helped him up, and gave him a B-cup across the wrist in the process . . . and it worked: it got his mind on one thing—and when he got his mind on that, Awareness took a back seat.

Then I had to get his mind off me—*I didn't want him focussing on me for more than a few seconds, because that's about as long as I could maintain my blocks against his scrutiny, as well as against his damned command to go off and huddle with him some place. If he really focussed on me, he'd read enough right through my blocks to make him ill-at-ease*

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with me—so he'd focus more, and sense my focus on him—*and he'd focus still more, and "know somehow" that I was "out to get him" . . . and so on, all in a few seconds . . . and that kind of focussing makes for Awareness.*

So I froze on him. I knew he was the kind of character who wouldn't give a second look at a gal who really turned him down—he could always take his pick elsewhere—he'd go off some place to make a pass, and the heat would be off for a while.

I froze—the firm-but-pleasant freeze, so as not to get a hostile focus.

And it worked. But for a second I was one dead B.

"Here, Peter," Van went on, "say a few words to this really sweet kid . . . I think you'll like her—" his voice got a little fainter— "Pat—your name *is* Pat, isn't it?—" feminine murmur— "Pat, this is Doctor Peter Farrel. He is thirty-eight, rugged, a little stuffy and only moderately successful. But he likes me, so he is a nice guy." His voice came back: "Peter, I want you to meet Pat Bridges. She is ageless as Circe, stacked, and one of my admirers—from a distance, damn it. H'm . . . Pete and Pat. You two should make. Name the kid Pete. Hey, there, fifteen minutes, old sock!"

Silence. At the phone, I mean—the party noises blasted on.

"Hello," I said tentatively. Van, the damned fool, had certainly put us both on the hook. I honestly half-expected the lady to simply hang up, on the premise that any friend of Van's deserved nothing but the best brushoff.

"Hello," came her voice—controlled, low, with warm overtones. I liked it immediately. It wasn't coy, it wasn't flustered, it wasn't phony-hearty.

"That was surely the most cockeyed introduction anybody ever had," I said. "Shouldn't we mumble and bumble and—"

"Let's not," she said, and there was a smile in her voice.

"Okay," I agreed. And then paused. What to say? . . . I'm not exactly the suave type. Then I remembered what Van had said in his dastardly introduction: "So you're a science fiction fan, eh?"

"Yes. Not too active, though. I just read it."

Pause.

"Like Van's work, eh?"

"I'm very impressed with his abilities . . . I don't think

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he really knows them himself."

Pause.

"Are you crazy too?"

"Only on Wednesdays."

"In a nice way, even then, I'll bet."

"Well, sometimes I lose my temper and yell."

I grinned. "Tonic for the system. Tell me, Miss Bridges, honestly—is that party as wild as it sounds?"

"Yes and no. It's noisy as all get out, but everybody's standing up."

I heard a wild yip in the background, over the piano-racket and voices.

"My God," said Pat Bridges. "Mr. van Voorhis isn't standing up now—he just tripped over a chair. He's lying on the floor, gazing up at ladies' legs and licking his chops." She paused. "Look, Doctor Farrel, I'm very glad to meet you, and so long—I think someone ought to get my hero planted on a couch before some furious swain kicks his teeth down into his hollow leg." Another pause. "I'd like to really meet you one of these hours—I don't think you sound stuffy at all—"

"I determined to meet you," I said, "when you first said hello, if you don't mind my saying."

"Till whenever, then," she said, "and I mean it."

Click.

It was a little abrupt; but I was whistling as I went in to complete my shave.

Which I didn't.

. . . van Voorhis hadn't tripped over a chair, Bill . . . I'd just made the excuse, because I'd seen van Voorhis follow a blonde wench in a green dress out into the penthouse hallway, and I knew just what was on his mind. And I had what I thought was a pretty good way of sinking his ship . . .

First, as soon as Pete hung up, I dialed the New York HQ and yelped for help. Helen Marx was there, and she said they'd have three As down at the Marlin in twenty minutes, and to do what I could in the meantime. I didn't have time to give her the whole story . . . if I had, though, I suppose she'd have said the same thing.

But . . . "do what I could" . . . that was a laugh! If van Voorhis Awoke, the only thing I'd probably do was die.

But at least the Society knew about him now . . . regardless of what happened to me, they'd get him. Strip him or kill him. But there was al-

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ways the danger, right now, that he'd start yelling his head off about the Society . . .

I sat there by the phone feeling sick, wishing the New York group didn't all live way the hell out in Forest Hills . . . and I followed van Voorhis lightly with my mind as he tailed the blonde along the corridor. If I couldn't dent him mentally, there was always the physical . . . and it would be a neat trick, if it worked . . .

Halfway across the chin, the phone rang again.

I banged the razor into the basin in irritation and caught the phone on the third ring.

It was Pat Bridges. "Doctor Farrel?" Her voice sounded tense.

Something was wrong. Then I caught it. The party noises had stopped. There was no music, no laughter; just some excited chatter in the background.

I said, "What happened? Party dropped dead?"

"No. But Mr. van Voorhis darned near has. We tried to call the hotel physician, but we couldn't get hold of him. Then I remembered you. Can you come up right away?"

"What's the matter with him?"

"We don't know. We found him out in the hall, by the penthouse elevator. He's blue in the face and gasping for breath, and practically unconscious—"

"I'll be right up," I said grimly, and hung up. It took me ten seconds to rinse the lather off my face and dive into my coat.

The bag came out from under the bed. Fate always has a way.

. . . she pulled the punch herself, Bill. Otherwise van Voorhis would have been out cold for the night.

It wasn't any trick to work on his libido while he caught up to her . . . I got him really going, by pumping some nifty erotic images at him. Then, when he cornered her and started his pitch, I took her over almost completely—I had to, or she might have played along with him, the way he was broadcasting bedroom. I found whatever there was in her that wanted to resist him, and gave it a hell of a boost, and when she was just confused and upset enough, wavering between "How dare you!" and "Well —I . . ." I gave her a good shot of sudden outrage and had her take a belt at his Adam's Apple—judo punch, thinking it would put him

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out of commission until the As arrived.

And it would *have . . . but, damn her, she pulled the punch. Maybe there was a little too much "Yes" in her, in answer to his demand. God knows, even* I *was squirming, clear out in the next room.*

So I wandered out fast and "found" them, while van Voorhis was still floundering around. I had an idea that while he was in this state I might at least be able to get my hands on that notebook of his, pretending to be opening his collar and all (the book was in his inside jacket pocket)—but when I knelt beside him, I got a blast of suspicion and fury from him that practically drove me through the wall. He was reading me, Bill—not that he knew it, or even hardly knew I was there; but he was. My B blocks were no longer any good—at least not at such close range. The closer I was to him, the more he'd start to boil around inside, picking up my focus on him, all my concern for the Society, all my intentions to do him dirt —picking them up as vague feelings of personal danger, of They *watching him, not necessarily associated with me on the conscious level, but still enough to stir up his Awareness.*

So now I'd really *loused things up nicely. I'd fumbled my attempt to inactivate him —and now I couldn't even get* near *him.*

I practically ran down the hall, and with every step I could feel him cool off a little —with the stimulus of my presence removed, all his fury was consciously directed at the blonde who had clipped him. And that was fine by me—because things were worse off now than they'd been before, whether he cooled a little or no: the mean level of his Awareness had risen enough to give me the shudders. The poison he was broadcasting followed me through the door like a tongue of flame.

I wished I had a gun at that moment, Bill . . . I think I'd have just used it on him, and taken the consequences. Anything was better than the blast I'd get if he Awoke . . .

The blonde and I (she was putting on a great act of having found van Voorhis just a second before I did) got the penthouse crowd out into the hall to see what had happened to poor old Van, and their excited thoughts were a welcome blanket over his in my mind. Then I called Pete

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Farrel and got him up there, without even trying for the hotel medico . . . because now I had another *idea. I'd probed Pete back to front while he was focussed on me during the phone conversation—he was a decent, honest, thoroughly nice guy—one of those blue-white minds. And I'd also probed van Voorhis for his ideas on Pete: and solid old capable old Pete Farrel was just a bit of a father-image . . . van Voorhis had always depended on him a lot for counsel, comfort, and the courage of his convictions—though half the time, of course, van Voorhis would ask, "Pete, what do you think?" and then bump for the answer he wanted.*

Still, that dependence was there . . . and I just hoped this idea would work better than the first . . .

III

I GOT out of the elevator and sank uppers-deep in rug. I waded across the hall, which contained two expensive-looking chairs, a modern table, a yard-square Utrillo reproduction and indirect lighting. I rang on the penthouse door.

I heard party noises within, though not quite so loud as I had imagined them to be over the phone. Evidently nothing could entirely dampen the spirits of the 1955 World Science Fiction Convention.

The door opened. I walked in.

It was a large room, modern decór—gray and green, chrome and glass and grainy fabrics, big windows at one end opening out onto a terrace—and there were at least sixty people in it, in chairs, on divans, standing, sitting on the floor. The party was indeed in progress again. The baby grand was being thumped, the guitar was twanging, a girl was singing "The Ten Days of Christmas" in a voice that wouldn't have been bad if she hadn't been plastered and pronouncing "partridge" as "par-r-rage."

A low voice at my elbow said, "Doctor Farrel?"

I recognized the voice. I looked around and saw no one. A hand plucked my sleeve. I looked down. It was Pat Bridges—all five-feet-two of her. It was she who had let me in—and promptly enough to make me suspect that she'd been waiting by the door.

I blinked down at her, sur-

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prised at her smallness, which just didn't go with the voice. "Yes. Hello, Miss Bridges. Where is he?"

"In the bedroom. We took him in there." She got a good hold on the sleeve and steered me through the crowded room toward one of the corridors that opened off into the rest of the penthouse suite. As we walked, I got analytical. The noise hadn't abated at my entrance, which meant that my arrival hadn't been anticipated with fear and trembling, which meant that Van probably wasn't too badly off. Or at least didn't seem so. I relaxed a little and, as we went into the corridor, took a closer look at Pat Bridges.

She had the perfect body you so seldom find in a small woman. That is, she wasn't slim and boyish. Nor was she made up of variously sized globes, with a big one out behind. She had a woman's body, soft, well rounded, perfectly proportioned if I'm any judge: a real winner of a body, but all built on a sport car scale. Her hair was short and black. Her eyes were so dark as to appear black, with startlingly white whites, not a capillary showing.

Her face was a type I'd always liked . . . too often, black hair and eyes go with a slinky look, carefully cultivated. But Pat Bridge's face was outdoorish—round pink cheeks, short nose, firm mouth, an open, alert kind of friendliness all over it. Somehow the face didn't go with her coloration. Just as her size and voice didn't match up. Girl of paradoxes. I rather liked it. One wondered what Miss Bridges was really like.

We'd picked up an entourage on our way toward Van's bedroom. As Pat stopped by the door I glanced around and saw four or five people hounding my heels, all looking intent. I knew the look Doctors see it all the time in distant relatives.

I went through the door. The others crowded in after me. Van was lying on the bed. I took one look at him and turned and said to my public, "In a word, scram."

"I *beg* your pardon?" said one of them, a good-looking blonde in a green dress. She widened baby-blue eyes at me.

I put out my jaw. "I'll have to ask you to leave the room. I forgot to sell tickets tonight." These people who crowd into sickrooms to watch the doctors perform irritate the hell out of me—they remind me of those dev-

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ils who gather at the scenes of accidents, muttering how horrible it all is while their eyes come out on stalks as they gawp at the blood.

The blonde said petulantly, "Well, after all, doctor, Van's our friend—we want to know how he is—"

"I'm sure you do. But I'll have to examine him in private. It's his business, what's wrong with him, and if he wants to tell anyone about it later, that's his business too. Now . . ."

The tall man beside the blonde took her arm. "He's right, Joyce . . . come on, let him get to Van."

The blonde pouted. "Oh, all right, Jack. But I think the doctor's an old meanie." She looked past me at Van, lying on the bed—he was looking at her. "I'm awfully sorry anything happened to Van—I really am. I hope he's all right. It must have been an accident." She looked at Van a second longer, then turned and went out, the tall man following her.

The others took my dismissal with better grace, and went out looking apologetic.

Pat Bridges hadn't crowded in. She'd stopped by the door. Now she stuck her head in. "You tell 'em, Doc," she whispered, and winked at me. "My, how fierce!"

I grinned at the little devil and shut the door.

. . . I went and sat in a chair near the end of the hall, and listened through Pete's mind to what went on in the bedroom. Every block I had was up full force . . . I'd have to touch van Voorhis' mind only once, and I'd have to make it good. There were two reasons for what I was going to do . . .

Van said, "Well, fancy meeting you here, old os," and his voice squeaked like the rusty cow-pasture gate he and I had swung on when we were kids in Iowa.

He lay on his back on the bed, fists clenched at his sides, and I thought that I had never seen him looking worse, which was saying quite a lot. The blond Satan was a damned dissipated Satan. There were blue-yellow rings under his eyes. The flesh beneath the rings was puffy-looking, and the skin under his jaw sagged back as though it wanted to crawl down his neck and onto the pillow. You really have to work at it to loosen up that way.

His checked sport jacket

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had been tossed on a chair. His tie was yanked down, his shirt opened halfway down his chest. He was obviously having a lot of difficulty breathing. His chest heaved —short, sharp breaths that rasped. His eyes were distressed.

I said, "You're in awful shape, but with you that's chronic. What in hell happened to you, son?"

He grinned—the lousiest excuse for a grin I'd seen in a long time. "Let's just say I ran into a hard object, Peter. Let's just leave it at that."

I said, "H'm," and pulled up a chair beside the bed. I palpated his neck gently, and he winced.

"Take it easy, you goddammed butcher," he squeaked.

"Shut up. Want to tell me what happened?"

"None of your business. Like I said, I connected with a hard object."

He seemed a lot soberer than he'd sounded over the phone. That meaningless grin was still pasted across his face, but his eyes had a hard, wary look in them.

"Well, you're lucky," I said. "The object gave you quite a wallop, but it didn't crack the cricoid cartilage. But you've got a nasty traumatic laryngitis—"

"Big words, love that boy. Friddlepoop of the diddlefrop. In other words, I've got myself a beat-up throat. This I didn't need a doctor to tell me."

"You'd better take it easy for a time. The best thing in the world you can do right now is go to sleep. Don't drink. Don't romp around making whoopee, and particularly don't make whoopsy. You vomit with that throat and it'll be an experience you'll never forget, I guarantee it. Just rest."

"Rest? Oh, my dear boy, for Christ's sake, who can think of resting, with all that wonderful alcohol flowing like alcohol and so many beautiful women to be brutalized—" He started to get up, got his massive head exactly two inches off the pillow, gasped, "Oh, Jesus *God!*" and sank back, eyes squinted shut so tight the lids crinkled.

"Satisfied?" I said placidly. "You're in no shape to brutalize a squirrel. Take it easy." I bent down and opened my bag, which I had set beside th bed. "I'll give you a sedative—"

He squeaked several sentences containing more four-letter words than I'd ever

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thought could be compressed into so little space. "All right, sawbones, I hate to give you the satisfaction, but I do feel a little under the weather."

I took a blue capsule from my bag — standard three grain dose of amytal. "Where's the bathroom?"

He pointed. I went and got a glass of water, brought it back, gave it to him with the pill. I lifted his head so he could swallow. He damned near hit the ceiling when it went down. "Jesus, that hurt," he whispered.

"It's going to hurt for a week, so get used to it. Get a good night's sleep. I'll come up tomorrow morning for another look. You won't really need it, but the way you'll be feeling you'll need someone to tell you you're not dying, and I guess I'm it."

"Thanks," he said. He lifted his curving brows at me, just the outsides of them. "You know . . . it's good to see your so-called face again." For the first time tonight he wasn't being superficial or cute. He meant it.

The big window beside his bed was open. It was gray evening outside. An eary September snow was blowing lightly, skittering along the outer sill.

"Want the window closed?" I asked him.

"Hell, no . . . I staggered up and opened it myself. If that funny stuff floating around is fresh air, I'll have to try it again some time. Feels good."

"Sure you don't want to tell me what happened?"

"That's right."

I bent to snap shut my bag.

"Peter—"

"Yes?"

"About that matter I mentioned over the phone. I'd like to—"

"Not now," I said firmly.

"But—"

"Not now," I said, almost harshly. "The more you talk, the more you'll aggravate that throat and it'll hurt twice as bad. You'll have enough trouble sleeping anyway. Let it wait."

Talking wouldn't hurt his throat at all—but I said it anyway, and I didn't quite know why.

"But I—"

"Look," I said, and for the first time I let it show that I was really peeved. For the first time, I *realized* that I was peeved. "Get the hell beddy bye."

He looked at me sharply. He rolled his head on the pillow so he could get a better look. "You mad, old os?"

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"A little."

"Why?"

"When I was in the army, last war, I learned some judo. And I had occasion to use it in Normandy. If that hard object you ran into wasn't the heel of somebody's hand, I'm wronger than I think I am. Somebody clipped you, is my guess."

His lips twisted sourly. He tried to say something, but his throat caught and it wouldn't come. I looked at his eyes. They didn't share his phony grin. The hardness in them had come to the surface. They were malevolent. It shocked me.

"That," he squeaked, "is neither here nor there. That will iron out nice and flat and clean, all in good time. My goodness, the things you say! Why, who'd clip old van Voorhis?"

"I don't know whose wife you fell on this week."

He looked regretful. "None this week, Peter."

"Okay," I said. "So I'm a snooping idiot. I just thought if somebody took a crack at you, maybe next time they'd try harder. Did you know that a clip in the throat like that can kill you? Quick, clean, neat. And dead as hell."

Van glared at me. "Nobody tried to kill me. Everybody *loves* me. *I* love me. I love *everbody*. Mind your own goddamned business, you baby-plucker. Look, while we're alone, I want to tell you about that thing I mentioned—"

"I," I said, getting up, "am going to be a triple-plated bastard. I'm going to hike myself down to the dining room, and have a two inch steak. With french fries and creamed spinach and a tossed green salad. I will leave you and your mysteries until the morrow, Van. And every time I chew into that steak I will think of you lying up here with a throat that somebody maybe tried to cave in, and just missed, and I will get angrier and angrier because you won't tell me what it's all about. I think you're a damned fool. I like you, even if you are an unregenerate maniac. The diagnosis is as stated, and the prognosis worries me. And now, good night."

He groaned. "Pax . . . pax . . . look, it's not that bad, Peter. I swear nobody tried to kill me. On my own dear Daddy's grave, may God give him many cows to milk for he loved doing it in the dawn-light, nobody tried to kll me!"

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I looked at him. There was sincerity in his voice—what remained of it. And there was sincerity in his face. He was looking me in the eyes, not between them.

That was that. I had to believe him. I knew Van, and had seen him lie often enough to call him when he was doing it, though he was an expert. He was telling the truth.

But I could still read that malevolence in him, a fury deep down behind the eyes. I'd seen that before too—and someone was due for a bruise. Van was definitely not one to cross.

"All right," I said. "Nobody tried to kill you. I believe you. I guess you could've fallen and struck a railing or something."

He sighed. "Yessir, that sure could've happened. It sure could. *Now* will you let me tell you about—"

"*No,*" I said—and once again I surprised myself with my own vehemence. "It'll keep, damn it. Somebody belted you, lethal intent or no. Damned if I'll listen. Go to sleep."

He looked at me carefully for a moment, lips pursed. Then he sighed again and grinned. "God, you *are* a suspicious bastard. All right, it'll wait. Listen, before you go, tote me another glass of water, will you? Gotta thirst."

Feeling both puzzled and a little guilty at the way I'd been behaving, I brought him another glass of water. I bent, picked up my bag, snapped it shut.

As I reached for the doorknob I looked back at him and softened even more. Van was selfish and crazy as a schizophrenic lon, and I guess a lot of people probably thought he was a louse all the time—I know I did part of the time—but there was a lot of likable stuff in him—good stuff, which he showed once in a while when he thought no one was looking. Somewhere he'd just got the notion that the best way to get through life was to greet each new day with a blare of contempt. That way it couldn't hurt you.

"I'll see you tomorrow, Van," I said. "You can ask me whatever you want, then."

His eyes were half-closed. "Oh, I will, Peter. Or maybe you'll want to ask *me*. But we'll get together. It'll make. It's in the bag, old os."

"Glad you're so confident," I said dryly. "Right now, with someone taking whacks at

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you, I wouldn't lend you a wooden nickel."

His eyes popped open. "You think I want money?"

"Don't you?"

He grinned. His eyes closed again. "Always, old dear. Always."

He snored—a ripper. He couldn't possibly be asleep yet. I raised my own eyes to Heaven and stepped out and closed the door.

. . . by that time, Bill, I was back in the main room, patting my back like mad on having pulled off a beautiful bit of business. It just went off like clockwork!

First of all, I'd handled the blonde in the green dress again—the one I'd had clip van Voorhis. I took her over just enough to get her to follow us to the bedroom—I don't think she'd ever have had the nerve otherwise—but I pulled her along with notions of self-recrimination and fears that van Voorhis would set the whole damned FBI and the Marines on her for assault and battery and so on. So I got her to make that lame half-apology, half-accusation at the door.

As I'd figured, it focused van Voorhis even more on her —got his anger at her up again to the point where it crowded everything else out of his mind. Nobody could slug Fred van Voorhis in the throat, by God—he'd slap that dame silly when he got on his feet! An accident, eh? . . . he'd show her an accident, etc. and so forth.

Then, when van Voorhis finally did start to talk telepathy, I got Pete to blow his top over van Voorhis' refusal to tell what had happened to him. Every time van Voorhis opened his mouth, Pete (and I) cut him off with indignant references to someone clipping him in the throat, and how he damned near got killed and all that, all of which served to direct van Voorhis' conscious mind right back to the blonde and off telepathy . . . to focus his frustration and anger and pent-up energy where it wouldn't do any harm.

Then—and this was the dangerous part, Bill; up to now I'd been fooling only with Pete's mind — when van Voorhis finally was convinced that Pete wasn't going to listen, I touched his mind just long enough to stick one little idea there—the idea that good old Pete could help him with all his uncertainty and confusion, that Pete, given the dope, would be able to come up with something comfort-

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ing and revealing and reassuring—all the vague needs in an immature personality like van Voorhis' for a quasi-parental solicitude and reinforcement were grist for this one notion: that he could tell Pete about the "telepathy story," which was exciting him so and somehow disturbing him so, against Pete's will; and Pete would come running back pronto as soon as he found out about it, and sit down and let van Voorhis pour out his soul.

In the bag. . .

That's what van Voorhis said . . . and that's where his little black notebook was. In Pete's doctor's bag, where van Voorhis had stuck it after sending Pete for the second glass of water!

Lovely, eh? It appealed to van Voorhis' sense of humor; it was a perverse accomplishment of purpose; it was a salve to the frustration he felt because Pete wouldn't listen; it was getting away with something—it would bring Papa Pete back on the double, as soon as he found the book and looked it over, to say, "Tell me all about it, son . . . it looks terrific . . . you're a genius . . . tell me what you wanted to tell me; not what I wanted to hear."

Cockeyed? Well, naturally . . . I was dealing with a cockeyed state of mind. Van Voorhis' emotional needs, as he teetered on the verge of Awareness, were about as irrational as you can get. Primarily, he just needed to spill over . . . and I gave him a way to do that. And a lot of tension vanished, when he did.

As I said, I had two reasons for doing what I did: one, to get the notebook; two, to put van Voorhis in the best possible state of mind, in this worst of possible situations.

So now van Voorhis was lying there, alternating between satisfaction at his little trick and plans to break the blonde's jaw, and his Awareness was at the lowest ebb of the night, and the As must be about halfway to the Marlin by now—and for the first time I began to think I had a chance of living to see daylight.

And that's what I had—just a chance.

IV

THE party was still rolling. Merry was being made. "Partridge" was now "par-r-rj."

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I attracted pretty much the same group as before.

Pat Bridges got to me first. "How is he?" she asked.

"Perfectly okay," I assured her. "Nothing serious at all. I gave him a sedative and told him to stay put and get some rest. He'll feel better tomorrow."

The blonde in the green dress came over, the tall man still with her, and I got myself a closer look at her. Triangular face. Big blue eyes that slanted up ever so slightly at the outer corners. Fine yellow hair, cut short and mannish. A body you see in high-fashion advertisements — thinnish, but all there. A prickle ran up my back and straightened my shoulders with what I thought must be an audible twang. If I'd had a paunch, I'm sure I'd have sucked it in—but fortunately I don't. I am six feet one, weigh one hundred and eighty six, have black hair with some gray at the temples, play golf in the high 90s to keep in trim, and at that moment I hoped I looked interesting. Science fiction seemed to produce some damned good-looking women, if nothing else. Pat Bridges, though an entirely different type—far more let's-go-hiking, while this one was strictly let's-lie-down-and-talk — had managed to curl my toes even more. The farm boy in me, maybe. No wonder Van seemed so happy in science fiction. He had only to reach out and gather them in.

The blonde said, "Oh, I'm afraid I was rude to you, Doctor Farrel, when you asked us to leave the room. I'm sorry. Really I am. I was simply worried about Van."

"I only hope I wasn't too rude myself," I said, knowing damned well I had been. "I was worried about Van too."

"I know," she said. "Pat told us you and he were old friends. It's lucky for him you were in the hotel, what with the hotel doctor not available." She studied me with her big blue eyes. "You know, you don't sound like New York, Doctor. You sound like midwest to me."

"Sioux City, Iowa, I'm in town for the convention of the American Society of Obstetrics. It's here in the Marlin too."

"Oo-o-o-h!" she said. "An obstetrician! So *that's* why Van wouldn't say what'd happened . . . oh, tell us, was it a boy or a girl?"

I smiled. Pat Bridges grinned a gamin grin. One of the men listening chuckled and

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said, "And who on Earth could the *mother* be?"

"I'm not really an obstetrician," I said. "Just a G. P. But a doctor in a town the size of Sioux City has to double in brass, and it's a large part of my practice . . which is why I'm here."

"It's time we got around to introductions, don't you think?" the blonde said. "I'm Joyce Harrick. I'm here because my brother's crazy—" she nodded at the tall man—"he writes science fiction—very cerebral stuff. He's destroyed the world a hundred times and saved it only sixty, but he's still a nice guy. Jack, meet Doctor Peter Farrel—"

I shook hands with Jack Harrick, and was introduced to several others who had come up—and for the first time I noticed that all of them wore small name-cards pinned to jacket or dress: THIRTEENTH WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION; and the name typewritten below — Smith, del Rey, Pohl, Boucher, Gold.

"As you so eloquently put it a while back, Doctor," Joyce Harrick said, when I'd met everybody, "It's none of our business, of course, What's wrong with Van, I mean. But can't you give us just an inkling? We're worried. Honest to God, I was scared green when I found him in the hall. I just wandered out for a little peace and quiet, and there he was, sprawled on the floor, gasping like a flounder."

Pat Bridges turned to me. She had to tilt her head way back to look up at my face. "After we talked on the phone," she said, "Mr. van Voorhis wandered off before I could get my hands on him. I didn't think much about it. Then a minute or two later I went out into the hall, and Miss Harrick had just stumbled over him. We went back and got help and carried him inside. We didn't know *what'd* happened . . . Miss Harrick thought maybe he'd passed out from too much liquor, and I thought it was a heart attack, the way he was grunting and gasping."

"It *wasn't*, was it, Doctor?" Joyce Harrick said. "A heart attack or anything like that?"

"No," I said. "Nothing like that." I paused. *What the devil,* I thought. *Why not quote the stubborn fool and let them draw their own conclusions?* "He ran into a hard object, that's all. Caught him in the throat."

Pat looked wise. "Betcha the hard object was some-

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body's fists. One of the guys here has been threatening all evening to take a poke at Mr. van Voorhis if he didn't quote keep his greasy tentacles off his girl unquote. Bet he got him out and stood him against the wall. God knows, van Voorhis was asking for it—but I think I'll hunt up the guy and glare at him anyway. Mr. van Voorhis was so potted he didn't know up from down. I don't think it was a very nice thing to do."

Joyce Harrick was looking indignant. "Well, I'll just go with you," she said. "The very idea!"

I relaxed a little. And began to feel like a bit of an idiot. All the life-is-serious stuff I'd thrown at Van in the bedroom, and all the time he'd very likely just tangled with some swain at the party who'd resented his irrespressible prancing after females. Someone had gotten him out in the hall and whopped him one — maybe someone who knew judo and knew just how hard to hit—and that was the size of it. Van had been handed a lesson in manners. And now he was planning sweet revenge—he'd save up his strength, by God, and tomorrow he would sally forth and paste his attacker in turn. Kid stuff . . . and I'd got myself into a dither over it, had built up a picture of grim and ugly doings.

Farrel, I told myself, *at times you're a bit of a fogey.*

And with that I shoved Van and his throat out of my mind.

"Well, I'm glad he's all right, anyway," Joyce Harrick was saying. "And now, Doctor—" she took my arm. Not the sleeve, but the arm through it. A firm grasp—just the right amount of pressure on it to stand my neck-hairs at attention. She knew what she was doing, that one. And she knew I knew it. "Won't you join us and have a drink? I'd like to make my apology more concrete than words."

Squeeze.

God knows, I was tempted. My neck-hairs and all my gregarious impulses said yes. The party was much nicer than I'd thought it would be. I'd expected a bunch of uncombed fanatics prattling Buck Rogers stuff. Instead I saw nice-looking people—a darned intelligent-looking lot, I had to admit. I thought that Van had somewhat overstated their abandon—nobody could project better than Van—and that I probably *could* enjoy myself with them.

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But—and it suddenly hit me again—I was tired, and I felt grimy after my long drive, and the unceasing noise of the place was running along my nerves. I knew, sensibly, that I was in no mood for such goings-on.

"No, thanks, really," I said. "I'd like to, but I've just had a long drive, and I'm more in the mood for a shower and dinner right now. I'd like a raincheck, though, for a little later in the evening, if I may—maybe calories will raise my tolerance to decibels."

"Any time, Doctor—we'd love to have you." She unfastened my arm, which immediately felt lonely, flashed me a smile and went away. The others left in ones and twos.

Pat Bridges stayed to see me out.

At that moment the door of the penthouse suddenly burst open and a group of eight or ten youngsters came in—ages ranging from about fourteen to twenty. Several of them wore monstrous rubber masks, red and green and purple Martians and robots and Frankensteins. One waved something which I took to be a disintegrator ray. He pulled the trigger. It whizzed and sparks shot out. Another kid had, God's truth, a third eye glued in the center of his forehead.

"Fans?" I asked Pat Bridges numbly.

She grinned. "Don't jump out the window. You'd be amazed at the intelligent kids you find among them—years ahead of themselves, really. Talk to some of them. You'll see."

"Um," I said, looking at that third eye.

"I'm sorry you have to leave, Do—look, may I call you Peter?"

"I wish you would."

"And you call me Pat."

"Done."

"Well, I'm sorry to see you go, Peter."

"Young lady, I'm so hungry I could bite into my own caboose—and I could spare some of it, too." I looked down at her from my eleven inch vantage point and was seized with what some have called inspiration and others opportunism. "Look. May I rush you into having dinner with me? I'd much rather have company—and you're just about the nicest company I've seen."

"Why, Peter!" she looked smug. "Golly, I can't refuse, after that! Besides, you've caught me hungry, and my

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mother always told me to be practical."

"Good. Shall I pick you up at your room?"

"No. This hotel is one unholy mess. The room numbers don't make sense. Let me meet you down in the dining room."

"All right. That I should be able to find, at least. Six thirty, say? . . . that's about ten minutes."

She nodded. We started toward the door, Pat barging into groups of people, me following like a kodiak after a teddy.

At the door she said, "I simply must tell you, Peter. I hope you won't think I'm fresh. But you look so cute with one half of your face shaved and the other half all black bristly."

I rubbed my face. "God in Heaven," I said. "Let me *out* of here."

She was laughing as she closed the door.

. . . most of all, I wanted to get that notebook out of the penthouse, and that meant getting Pete and his bag out. The blonde, Joyce Harrick, tried her best to get him to stay . . she was itching to find out what van Voorhis had told him about the beat-up throat, and I guess I can't blame her too much—I'd be worried too if I'd walloped somebody that way—somebody like Van, in particular. So I relaxed Pete as much as possible about the whole thing—his peeve had served its purpose, anyway—and upped her sensitivity to his mood . . . and she was satisfied that he didn't know what had happened, and took her claws out of him. Then I gave Pete's tiredness a boost, and upped his sensitivity to all the racket and everything, and he ran along like a good little boy. And I'm pleased to say that I didn't have to push very hard to get that dinner date out of him, either! . . . remained now only to have him find the book and bring it to me.

I told him that he looked real cute half-shaved that way, and the poor guy practically burned up the carpet getting to his room. . . .

V

WELL, I finally finished that shave. Then I showered, loving every minute of it, got into my best blue suit and started for the door.

Halfway there I paused—grunted—went over to the

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bed—stooped, dragged out my bag from where I'd stuck it—opened it—and took out a little black leather notebook.

. . . Van's notebook. The one he used to jot down ideas for stories.

That's what it was.

I turned it over in my hands, completely flabbergasted—I felt my jaw hanging open, and closed it with a snap.

Van must have stuck the book in my bag when I was up in his bedroom.

But why?

Or maybe it had fallen in—off the table, or the chair beside the bed. . . .

But *how* had *I* known it was there, in my bag? . . . what in the name of God had prompted me to go over and open the bag and find it?

I flipped through its pages, scowling, wondering if it had anything to do with Van's mysterious problem he wanted to discuss with me. Maybe, I thought, the problem *wasn't* money—maybe he *had* put the book there on purpose—and I flipped the pages more slowly, looking at Van's pencil scawl but hardly seeing the words.

Then, with sudden decision, I shoved it into my pocket. The hell with it. Van's ideas were his own—he could have them, as well as his problems. I'd give it to Pat, and she could give it to Van when she went back upstairs. If he had put it there purposely, I wasn't going to give him the satisfication of having slicked me into doing whatever it was he wanted me to do . . . let the guy find out he couldn't always get by with it.

But how had I known the damned thing was there?

And . . . come to think of it . . . how had I even known that it was *Van's story notebook?* I'd never seen it before in my life!

Well . . . the name Fred van Voorhis would be written on the inside of the cover . . . I took it out once again, looked for the name—and there it was.

. . . *How had I known about that?*

Feeling dazed, I went down to the dining room, which was just off the lobby, and ordered a double Scotch.

Pat Bridges showed promptly at six thirty. I liked that. I saw her coming through the big half-draped windows that separated dining room and lobby.

She had flattered me by changing dresses, and wore a trim green-and-white outfit that with her black hair and

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eyes made her absolutely stunning. With the high-powered Harrick sex-appeal out of the picture, and off my arm, I realized that I really found this girl much the more likable of the two.

The moment she sat down, I took the notebook out of my pocket and gave it to her.

"Here," I said, "I guess you want this, don't you?"

And once again I felt that my jaw must be hanging halfway to the floor.

. . . Why, why, why had I said *that?* She didn't want Van's notebook, any more than I did. How could she even know about it? I had intended to say, "Look, I found this in my bag after I got back to my room—Lord knows how it got there. Give it to Van, will you?"

But what had come out was: "I guess you want this, don't you?"

She was smiling at me—a funny little smile, with her eyes kind of veiled.

Then, as I watched, her eyes became almost glazed. She seemed to sort of freeze there, her hands resting on the edge of the table, her head a little to one side. She stayed that way for about seven seconds, while—at first—I just stared, wondering what the devil could have hit her.

I say "at first," because just about as the first second ended, I was suddenly more terrified than I'd ever been before in my life.

For absolutely no reason at all. Just an utter, complete, formless terror that hit me like an icy hurricane, and stiffened me in my seat, and clenched my hands on the table in front of me so hard they hurt.

I felt that I had to *fight.*

I sat there, still as a board, and *fought*—I fought the faceless, nameless terror until I could almost feel energy draining out of me, as if I *were* engaged in some kind of combat . . . I began to tremble all over with the strain of it.

It went that way for six more seconds that seemed like hours.

Then, at the end of the seventh second, something new was added: I felt boiling up in me a surge of the most godawful fury I ever felt in my life—a vicious, hating, screaming kind of rage . . . and still the horrible fear—even stronger, and somehow different now—the fear now that you might feel if you knew you were going to die in the next second. . . .

Then it was gone—all of it. Normalcy returned, with a

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kind of crystal clarity of sense impressions, and the feeling of deep quiet, though the dining room noises were all about us—and I sat there frozen, stunned, wondering what in hell had hit *me*.

Pat seemed to have recovered—she was smiling a little again — a trembling smile, I saw through my still half-closed eyes.

"Pete," she said softly.

"M'm . . ." I said, shaking my head and blinking.

"Feeling all right?"

"I—I—something *hit* me just then . . . God in Heaven, I don't *know* what it was . . . a sort of mixed-up emotional gamut, everything chasing each other—the damnedest thing—"

"I thought you looked sort of funny," she said.

I moved my shoulders—almost a shiver. "So did you—for a minute. Just before—whatever it was hit me—"

"I did?" She looked surprised. "Oh . . . I was just thinking of something else. I was—wondering how Mr van Voorhis was doing."

"Well—" I said—I was trying to unclench my hands; they were stiff and aching, and I was staring at them, not quite sure they were mine —"well . . h'm . . . he'll be all right. Nothing serious."

"Yes," she said. "I guess everything's all right now."

A waiter appeared. Pat said Martini, and I ordered it for her. I was glad for the opportunity to do something down-to-Earth, like ordering a drink . . all the weird things that were happening tonight were getting to be just a little too much for me. Van's throat . . . the notebook . . that crazy emotional wallop of a moment ago. . . .

Pat and I made get-acquainted talk. She'd been born in Wisconsin . . . studied dramatics . . . always liked science fiction . . even written some stories; bad ones, she said, which never sold . . . that kind of talk. You know. We changed subjects a dozen times, and became animated, and found that we could disagree in the most delightful manner, and found that we were enjoying each other's company quite a lot. So much, in fact, that we realized it at about the same time, after which the talk became a little soberer, as if we were at once suspicious of such a good thing and looking for the catch.

I ascertained, by the adroit method of bluntly asking her, her age, Twenty eight. Thank Heaven she wasn't the child

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she appeared—though from her manner I'd thought she couldn't possibly be. More paradoxes. No woman should *look* that way at twenty eight.

At one time we heard a bit of a commotion in the lobby outside—people running back and forth. Some excited voices.

Fans, I thought bleakly.

I felt a touch on my shoulder. I had to struggle up, as it were, out of Pat's dark gaze. It was an unwelcome chore.

Two men stood by [illegible] table. One was big—nearly as big as I was—with good features that would have been handsome with less beef laid over them. He wore a worried look—a dead-serious look.

The other was a lumpy-shouldered type I'd seen in a dozen hotels from coast to coast—house dick. His face was one big scowl.

"Yes?" I said, rising.

"Doctor Farrel?" the big man said.

"Yes."

"I'm Philip Underwood, the hotel physician."

I shook his hand. The house dick was introduced as Max. He had protruberant eyes set too close together, a big mouth that looked sculptured out of cement, shoulders that looked a yard wide, and kidney trouble. He said, "Hiya," in a voice like bear in a cave—lungs like beer-kegs he must've had.

"Doctor Farrel," said Doctor Underwood in somber tones, "I believe you were called to attend a case up in the penthouse? A Mr. van Voorhis?"

I frowned. "That's right. He's an old friend of mine. They called me when you weren't available."

"I wasn't unavailable, Doctor Farrel. I was in my office at the time. I can't quite understand how that happened . . ."

"Surely there's no complaint, Doctor?" I inquired courteously. He didn't look the type to holler that I'd squeezed him out of a fee, but you never can tell.

"Oh, Lord, no," he said. "I suppose there's an explanation for that. But I'm afraid something terrible has happened."

I chilled. "Something terrible? I don't understand. Van was fine when I left him upstairs. Nothing serious—" I dumped my napkin on the table, ready to take off. A doctor doesn't use the word "terrible" loosely. Pat was looking at me, her eyes big. "I'd better get right up there—"

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"No," Underwood said. "He isn't up in the penthouse, Doctor. He—"

"He *isn't?*" I lost my temper a little. It was just like Van to get up and start raising hell and go out like a light. And it's just like people to bluster when they fear something worse is coming. In a perverse way, it's hoping for the best . . . you are imploring the fates to leave it at that. "The fool is up and around?"

Max rumbled, "He's down and around."

"That's a damned ugly thing to say, Max," Underwood snapped.

"What are you two trying to tell me?" I said brittlely. "What's happened?"

"He's down," Max said, without a trace of feeling in that voice of his. "He came down the hard way. One big step. Right inta the middle a Madison Avenue."

Pat turned pasty white and shrank into her seat. She moaned. She closed her eyes, which was a relief, for in her white face they'd suddenly become skull's sockets.

"He jumped," Underwood said. "Or fell. A dozen people saw him go out the window—there was nobody near him."

I sat there paralyzed. Icy cold. For some reason, something Pat had said upstairs came to my mind.

She'd said: *Mr. van Voorhis is so potted he doesn't know up from down.*

I wondered if Van had been able to make that distinction at the very last. I hoped he hadn't.

. . . and that was the end of it, Bill.

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Just as Pete gave me the notebook, van Voorhis Awoke.

God knows why—I guess there never has to be a reason for it to happen at any particular time—there he was all drugged and half-asleep, and in a pretty good state of mind to boot. But he Awoke. I think he may have caught Pete giving me the book—lying there, undisturbed and alone, not distracted too much by the party and all, he just may have spotted that, good state of mind or no. He may have had the feeling that all wasn't going well with his little plan . . . and he focussed a bit on that . . . and he sensed Pete giving the book to me . *and that was unexpected, so he focussed for a better look, and then a better one . and . . . well, focus, to repeat, makes for Awareness.*

I felt him suddenly in my mind like a wolverine—he'd gotten to me, found me. He was Aware. He swept my mind in one-tenth of a second and got the entire picture of what was going on.

Then he tried to blast me.

Bill, I think I'd be dead now, if van Voorhis hadn't still been half-drunk and half-asleep and drugged and everything. He jumped out of bed and stood there, focussing down through forty floors at me, trying to blast me, and I fought and fenced him with everything I had . . . he'd knock down a block and I'd throw up another, and pretty soon all I had left of my blocks were splinters. He let out a yell of triumph . . . that's what brought people running into the bedroom . . . and got set for the blast . . .

And from some place—you just guess from where, *Bill—I got a terrific boost. From some place there was enough power broadcast for me to pick up part of it and channel it into my defenses . . . and van Voorhis was groggy, and inexperienced besides, and I was fighting for my life . . . and I gave him a hell of a push, and the window was there . . . and that was it.*

God, Bill—I was with him all the way down.

He could have blasted me then, I was so weak from the struggle—but all he did was think hatred at me, and fear, fear, fear until he hit.

VI

"SOMEWHERE, beyond
Space and Time,
"Is wetter water, slimier
slime."

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Thus Rupert Brooke described the Heaven of a fish—and Van had always loved the thing.

What would be in Van's Heaven, I wondered later that night after the police had come and gone . . . immortal bottles, probably, and a harem that never even sat up for meals. I hoped he'd made it. He'd had the ticket, if only Saint Pete had looked hard enough.

But somehow it was incredible. It was appalling. I couldn't see Van plummeting forty stories to smash against concrete. It was—inappropriate. Fred van Voorhis should have departed this sphere at the homicidal behest of an outraged husband, or of a liver that gave up the fight. By the sword. By either edge of the blade.

Van, if he had to die, was the kind of character who should have died because of what he *was*.

I spent some time worrying that I might have contributed to his death, if it was suicide, by not listening to whatever it was he'd wanted to tell me. But . . . well, when a man is in such a state that he'll kill himself, I guess no one can claim responsibility. Van had hardly seemed despondent when I left him, though—he'd seemed almost amused about something. So I suppose it was an accident. Horrible. I wonder somehow if those strange things I felt in the dining room weren't a sort of premonition . . . the final fear I felt was very much what I think poor Van must have felt on the way down—the certainty that he was going to die.

And I wondered, while the police were asking questions, whether I shouldn't tell them about Van's notebook—whether that might not figure in the matter. But I didn't—damned if I know why. Don't ask me. I just didn't. I felt—well, I felt that nothing good would come of it if I did . . . just another of the strange feelings I'd been having all night. So I kept my silence, and Pat kept the book, and I somehow had the feeling that I might understand it all in time.

Two days later, when both our conventions were over, I put my hands under Pat Bridge's armpits and picked her up and kissed her, and smelled her perfume for the first time, and kissed her again and told her she was going my way from now on. Right in the hotel lobby. I can show you the spot.

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So can two damned science fiction fans who saw us and spread it all over the convention.

. . . so now we're on our honeymoon. And before you let out a yelp about telepaths marrying non-telepaths, Bill, let me say you're a dope if you haven't guessed long ago that Pete was a telepath himself. Latent, of course—and a plain old B, like me—but I'd detected him right off. That's why I could handle him so easily, and also why I could keep him under control at all times. Van Voorhis' unconscious influences on him—such as the time Pete started for the phone, because van Voorhis was thinking of him—were no match for my remote-control, focussed commands.

Pete has a high ESP factor, though, and I underrated it. Before I got the chance to spur him into finding the book, he sniffed it out himself . . and that almost exploded the whole works right then! He stood there in his room ESPing the book like mad, and I had to work like a dog to jam the astonishment he was broadcasting and keep it from getting up to stimulate van Voorhis! If he'd just found *it while poking through his bag, the way I'd planned to work it, he wouldn't have been half so floored, and he wouldn't have broadcast so.*

Anyway, I didn't have to make him bring the book to me, either—he did it on his own, knowing subconsciously that I wanted it. And I didn't have to keep him quiet about it afterward . . he knew how important that was.

And when I started to wrassle with van Voorhis, Pete got a good dose of both my fear and resistance—and he pitched in like a good latent and felt both as his own, *right up to the hilt . . . and the power I siphoned from* his *resistance to* my *danger, added to my own, was enough to jolt van Voorhis. Thank God that window was open!*

So that's all. I'm happier than I've ever been . . telepaths love quickly and well, don't they! . . because you know *each other. We'll be in Chicago next week, and you can meet Pete. He'll be Aware by that time . . I'm working on him.*

Poor van Voorhis. A nice guy in many ways . . consciously. Maybe we will *name the kid Pet.* —*The End*

Best,

Pat.

THE END

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MINISTER WITHOUT Portfolio

BY MICHAEL FISCHER

If invaders from space came to you and said, "We've come for your most treasured possession," how would you feel? In fact, what is your dearest possession?

THEY walked slowly into the room, the honor guard silently closing the doors behind them.

His shoes squeak, the President thought. *Hundreds of years ahead of us technologically, and they haven't found a way to stop shoes from squeaking.*

The man from space sat down on the opposite side of the desk. He was bald, short, pudgy, with a diplomat's smile. He used that smile very effectively in refusing a cigar, a drink, and then leaned back in his chair, a vegetable of a man, absorbing light and impressions like a vegetable

The ships had come two days ago. Huge gleaming spheres floating effortlessly in from the void. They grounded on prescribed landing areas near the Potomac, and the men emerged. Blue serge ambassadors speaking perfect English, carrying their leather portfolios, and smiling, always smiling.

"To be brief," the man was saying. . . .

His teeth are awfully even, the President told himself. *That mouth like the pink satin entranceway to some fairy tale castle. His teeth the portcullis opening and closing. . . . Open up those pearly gates. California here I . . .*

"Something wrong Mister President?" The tone was concerned, paternal.

"Oh no go right ahead. Just thinking."

"Funny," he mused. "The greatest crisis in two thousand years and all I can think of is shoes, and teeth, and . . ."

"Our mission here is not a long one," the man continued, his voice superbly modulated.

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"It seems that about 80 of your years ago there was a movement on our world to send missionary ships cruising through the Galaxy bringing the light of our civilization to backward planets, much as you sent missionaries to less advanced areas of your world. Needless to say ships built from the contributions of women's clubs and other well meaning but insolvent organizations leave much to be desired in the way of safety devices, and so . . ."

It was born out of blackness and the cold of outer space. Spilling its guts in great gouts of orange flame. It plunged drunkenly towards the globe below.

In atmosphere a minor rain storm condensed, and sizzled itself to death against its red-hot hide. Slowly, ever so slowly, it stabilized as the landing rockets clawed upwards against the pull of gravity, and hit; bursting its seams, tearing its heart to ribbons, digging its own grave in the unyielding earth.

Marl Dacron propped himself wearily against a tree, and cursed. There just wasn't anything else to do. Almost at his feet was a smoking valley scattered through which was the slightly steaming wreckage of his ship.

In his mind he reviewed the countless mishaps since the beginning of the voyage cursing each long and fluently. First the water converter had broken down, then the radar antenna crystallized, and snapped off in mid space, and lastly the landing jets which had exploded on first planet fall.

"It's a good thing the ejection pod worked," he thought. "At least I'm alive, and partially kicking."

Marl raised his eyes from the ground, and looked around at the new world. His first impression was of grayness; gray sky, gray mud, plain gray tree trunks splintered, lifeless. There was a strange smell in the air too; a smell of smoke, and burning, corruption, and rust. From the horizon bright flashes lept, punctuated with rythmic thunder.

"Nice place," Dacron muttered. "Well, gotta start going somewhere," he sighed. "Spread sweetness and light over these heathen lands."

Shrugging he began to walk briskly toward the flashes. The mud clung tenaciously to his boots. Each step deposited a bigger load of ooze on his soles, weighing

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down his laboring feet with more, and more mass. Fog condensed on his lashes, wet his hair, streamed down the dirt splattered face to form little deltas of sediment in the wrinkles of his skin.

"Pretty soggy," he repeated over and over. "Pretty damn soggy." On the horizon thunder boomed.

The whining roar penetrated his senses gradually, ate into his brain, hammered down the nerve pathways to the cortex. Marl looked up at the thing circling overhead. There was no doubt it was an aircraft, crude but recognizable. There were two airfoil sections, some form of propulsion unit. A strangely goggled pilot peered from the open cockpit. The whole plane seemed to be held together by wires of various lengths and diameters.

"What a hunk of junk," he grinned. "To these boys it must be the hottest thing on wings."

He started to wave his arm. Nothing like getting acquainted with the local population. . .

There was a change in the sound of the engine now. The plane had climbed to a higher altitude, leveled off, and began its dive. Pistons whined, air shrieked through the mass of wires, and wood. Like a huge ungainly hawk it struck dribbling orange fire from its blunt beak.

The first bullets kicked up mud 200 yards from Dacron. Instinctively he dived into a small hollow in the soil. Dived and clung, struggling to make his body as small as possible, to clutch the mud to his chest, cover himself with its protecting neutrality

The craft circled, swooped lower, its landing gear almost touching the ground, and then climbed and disappeared behind a rise. The red and white bull's-eye on the wings shrieked a last farewell.

Marl rose from the ground, a man sculptured in slime, a creature molded in mud.

"Either these people are sure unfriendly or it looks like I've run into a full scale war," he muttered half aloud "Projectile weapons and everything."

There was reason to be cautious now. The thunder, the flashes could only mean gunfire, and in time of war anything strange, anything not explained in some Standard Operating Procedure was enemy, and had to be destroyed.

And so he began to walk again in a new direction, to-

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wards what seemed to be a house on a distant hilltop. Every sense alert, he walked, sloughed mud off in sticky globs, and cursed fluently in the languages of three planets.

The bodies lay in the shadows of what once had been a garden wall—clustered grimly in death around some form of weapon which swayed drunkenly on a twisted tripod.

There was only one course of action now. His bright yellow survival suit was definitely too conspicuous for the immediate vicinity. Selecting a body that was about his size he began to strip it and don the outer garments.

The cloth was brown-green, and rough as abrasive. The fastenings of the tunic clumsy and unfamiliar. While one sleeve hung raggedly, crusted stiffly with rusty red.

Something small and alive scuttled into hiding behind the high collar. Marl scratched furiously for a moment his face distorted with disgust. Then smiled in triumph as the movement subsided. Clamping a dented metal helmet to his head he began once again his climb towards the skeleton of the house.

Oberleutnant Max Schuller chewed reflectively on his sausage and biscuit.

"God but it was good to relax." Why he ever volunteered to lead a patrol this far into No-Man's land he never knew. Not even the Kaiser himself could get him to do it again. In the east those damn English, and French batteries incessantly pounding his division to bits, and now those air craft flying overhead, making his men jittery, tearing already frayed nerves to bits. This was definitely not the Prussian way to make war.

He brushed a few crumbs from his tunic, walked to the door of the ruined house. There was a shout from the sentry, the sporadic rattle of gunfire. On the slope below Schuller saw the lone khaki clad figure.

"Don't shoot," he cried to the excited body of men. "He is alone. We can . . ."

One of the gray uniformed privates yanked a "potato masher" from his belt, pulled the pin, hurled it. The taut nervous men ducked behind a beam. Marl heard the shots, saw the scurrying figures above him. There was no time to think, no time to act. He didn't see the grenade land in front of him, didn't hear the explosion.

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Schuller walked slowly down the slope, bent over the still form. He returned to his men. He could do nothing . . .

"And so Mr. President," the man continued. "This ship from what we can piece together crashed in the area you call France. Unfortunately it was during one of your pre-atomic wars, and the pilot was killed. However imbedded behind the Mastoid bone of every crewman licensed for Space is a small pulse generator which transmits a recognition signal to a central receiving station. Naturally when one of our spheres picked up a signal which had been written off our records an investigation was made."

"Why in God's name does not he get it over with," the President muttered.

"Would you believe it? It's taken 50 of your years to finally pinpoint the body of that fellow on your world."

Sure, thought the President. *You've been most discreet. So-called flying saucers zipping through our skies, newspaper stories hinting of dire threats from the void, every kid turned into a Buck Rogers character.*

"And now at last," the smooth voice continued. "We've located him. Naturally there has been quite a lobby in our Council to bring this hero's bones home to rest. And as one politician to another you know what a strong lobby can do. The people rule in a true democracy eh?"

What I wouldn't give to smash them into your throat.

There was a knock on the door. A polite "We are ready Mr. President."

The ride to Arlington did not take long. There was a brief ceremony. The President mumbling a few words about the price of interstellar friendship. The man stepped forward. They shook hands, the President wincing involuntarily.

In another two hours they would be gone. They and the threat of the terrible weapons they had just demonstrated to him on a barren Lunar plain. There had been no resistance, no need to carry out that threat. The aliens had gotten what they wanted.

The President shielded his eyes from the sun, and watched as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was slowly lifted into the belly of a ship. The man waved benignly from the hatch playing his part to the last. There was a brief moment of acceleration. The ship was gone.

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You'd have thought Marion would have been happy when Arthur returned to her after an eight-year absence. After all, husbands don't grow on trees. But was this Arthur or Martin? And how could eight years turn into forty overnight? Also, what about——

The YELLOW NEEDLE

BY GERALD VANCE

DOC TOLLIVER'S phone rang. He rolled over and snapped on the bed lamp, glancing at the clock as he did so. Two-thirty A.M. Why couldn't people get sick on reasonable schedules? he wondered fuzzily. He picked up the receiver and said hello.

"Doc! He's—he's back!"

Doc Tolliver blinked away his sleepiness. The voice was that of Marion Garvey. It was tense—filled with horror. Doc said. "Marion. Now wait a minute. This *is* Marion Garvey isn't it?"

"Yes, Doc. Didn't you hear me? Didn't you understand what I said? *He's back!*"

"I heard you. But let's calm down a little. I gather someone's back and you're upset about it. I'm surprised because I didn't know anyone had been away."

"Doc! I'm talking about Arthur. He's back!"

Doc Tolliver blinked again, then smiled. "Why Marion! That's wonderful! I don't blame you for being excited. Did he just arrive? You must be about the happiest woman in Cod Cove."

"Doc—please. I'm not happy. I'm—I'm horrified! And it *is* Arthur, Doc. It couldn't be anybody else. Please come over. You're the only one I can really turn to. Please hurry."

A frown of bewilderment deepened the wrinkles in the old doctor's face. "Of course I'll come, Marion, but I don't understand what can be so horrible about a lost husband

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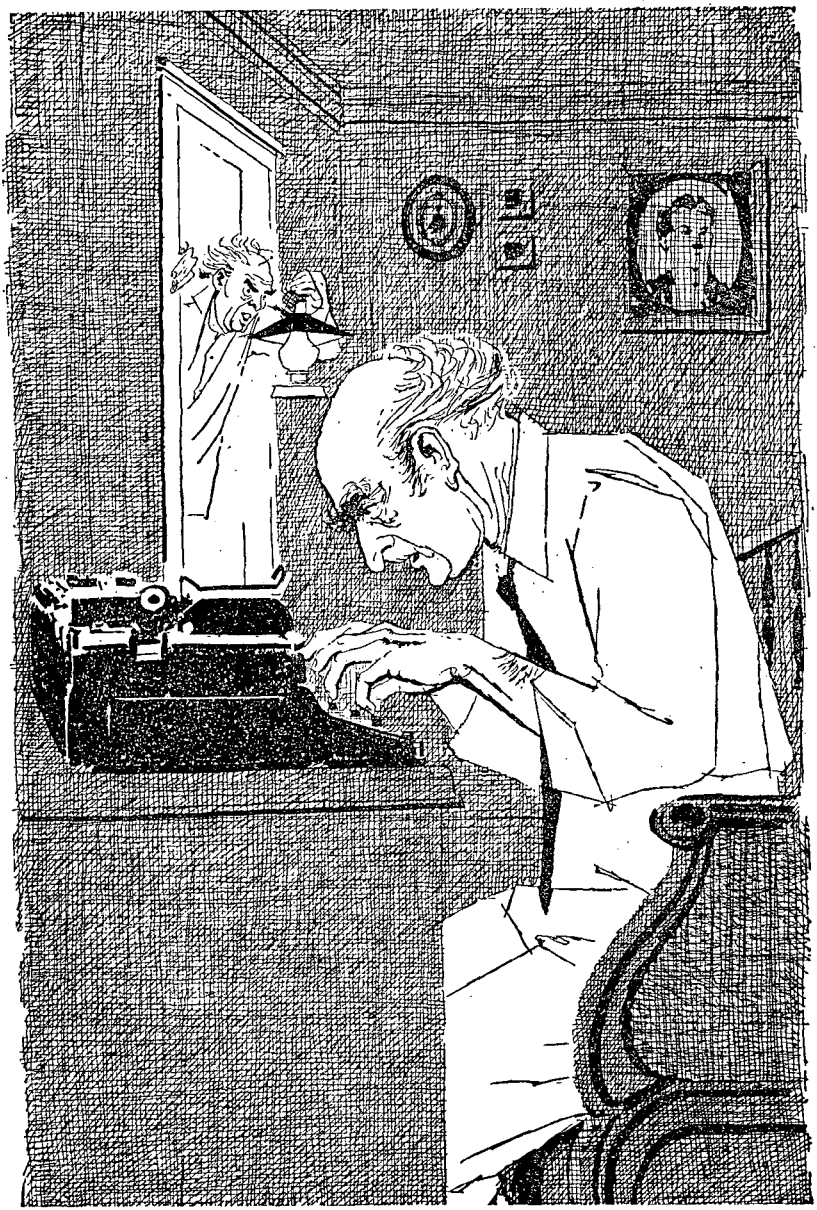

He worked with desperate speed.

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returning after eight years. I'd think you'd be happy."

"Happy? Oh, God, Doc! It's awful. Will you please hurry?"

"Of course. I'll be right along."

Doc Tolliver hung up and reached for his clothes. A few minutes later, he was chugging along Ocean Road in his antique Ford, the car he'd clung to steadfastly through the years because you could "depend" on it.

As he rode, Doc's thoughts went back to the tragic affair of Arthur and Marion Garvey. It had been—yes, eight years ago when they took that trip to the Orient. Arthur, as he remembered it, had not been too keen on the idea; but it was an ambition of Marion's life, so when Arthur sold his novel, *Dear Yesterday,* and it became such a success, there was enough money to do the thing comfortably.

The tragedy occurred in Cairo, and Doc Tolliver recalled it through the words of Marion: "Arthur had been restless and unhappy during the trip. His mind was rooted in the past, of course. While writing *Dear Yesterday,* I think he actually fell in love with the Mauve Decade—I think that's what it's called—the time in which the book was set, around 1900. Anyhow, that was what I attributed his vagueness to. He never seemed particularly interested in anything we saw in the Orient.

"Until the day we saw that weird demonstration by an Oriental *fakir* of some sort. This *fakir* had a little booth—a dirty place—in a little side street we wandered into. The demonstration was all hypnotism or some other fakery of course, but the effect was certainly startling. He sat with this odd little lamp or jug or whatever it was, in front of him and played weird music on a flute of some sort. As we watched, I felt suddenly weak—unclear in my mind—an effect of the trickery no doubt—but I'd be almost willing to swear that a blue cloud began to rise out of the bottle and that it gradually formed into a woman—sort of a harem *houri* in a dancing costume, who, I suppose from Oriental standards, was beautiful. She was very ghostly at first, but she got solider and solider until you'd swear it was a real woman standing there.

"The *fakir* stopped playing and grinned a broken-toothed grin at us and said, 'Be not afraid. She is from the past—the far, far past—' or words to that effect and then the

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woman smiled at us and walked out through a back exit. The *fakir* said, 'You have just witnessed the magic of the yellow needle.' That was all. Then he took up a collection.

"I'd have walked away and forgotten the incident, knowing it had to be fake, but Arthur seemed intensely interested. We moved on down the street a ways and stopped to look into a shop. After a moment, I glanced up and found I was alone. This annoyed me, naturally. Finally, I went back along the street and found Arthur talking to the *fakir*. He rejoined me immediately, and apologized for leaving me, which well he should have, and we went back to the hotel.

"Nothing unusual occurred after that. We finished the day and went to bed in the hotel, but the following morning, Arthur was not there. His bed had been slept in, but he'd vanished sometime in the night. I'll always believe that *fakir*—horrible little man—had something to do with it."

Doc Tolliver recalled the rest, and mighty little there was. Marion had raised quite a row and the Cairo police had looked into the matter, questioning the *fakir* and trying to unravel the mystery. No conclusion had ever been reached. The *fakir* was released for lack of evidence, Arthur was never found, and Marion came back to the States, where she'd since been living in the big house on Cod Point, kept comfortable by the royalties which had accrued from *Dear Yesterday*.

Now, it seemed, the mystery was near solution. Arthur, according to Marion, had returned. But it was obviously not a joyful reunion. Something horrible was involved and Doc Tolliver was eager to find out what it was.

He pulled up in front of the huge house, ghostly now, brooding there with the moon and the sea behind it. But the coughing of the Ford as the motor died, lent a down-to-earth note that broke the eerie spell somewhat.

He crossed the huge porch but did not have to ring the bell because Marion Garvey had it open for him even before he got there. She was a pretty, blonde woman in her middle forties, but now, her face was like a death mask; pasty-white, her blue eyes glazed and staring. He put an arm around her shoulders and said, "Marion! In heaven's name! What's happened to you?"

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"I told you over the phone," she said in a dazed voice.

He led her into the drawing room and sat her down; then went to the liquor cabinet and came back with a stiff shot of brandy. "Drink this," he ordered.

Marion downed the brandy like water. It brought a little color back to her cheeks and seemed to clear her mind. Doc Tolliver sat down beside her and said, "Now—let's get to the bottom of this. You told me over the phone that Arthur had returned."

Marion nodded.

"Well, what's so terrible about that? I'd think you'd be very happy."

Marion straightened as though having gotten better control of herself and turned her eyes on the old practitioner. "Doc—check these facts with me. I've got to know if I've gone mad."

"What facts?"

Marion ticked them off on her fingers. "First—how old was Arthur when he disappeared?"

"Thirty-seven, I believe—or thereabouts."

"That's right. And how long was he gone?"

"If he's returned, as you say, approximately eight years."

"Then how old would he be now?"

"Obviously around forty-five."

Marion stared fixedly at Doc Tolliver's face. "But," she said, "the Arthur who came home to me tonight, is far, far older than that. He's at least ninety."

There was a pause before Doc Tolliver said, "Then he can't be Arthur. It's as simple as that."

"Arthur had the tip of the little finger on his right hand missing, didn't he?" It was more of an assertion than a question.

"Yes."

"He also had a scar on his right elbow and that silly tattoo on his wrist." Doc Tolliver agreed and Marion said, "This man has them also, Doc."

He was about to launch another argument, but Marion brushed it aside. "A woman knows her own husband, Doc. It's absurd to say otherwise—"

"But after so many years?"

"The years have nothing to do with it. This man *is* Arthur, but he is an old, old man!"

"Men have been known to age swiftly under trying circumstances."

"Not fifty years in eight."

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"Where is Arthur now?"

"Up in his old room."

Doc Tolliver got to his feet, then turned. "Let me get a clearer picture," he said. "You merely told me that Arthur had come home. You didn't tell me where he came from or anything more along that line. Who brought him? How did he arrive? I saw no car outside."

"So far as I know, no one brought him. He didn't arrive in a car or in any other vehicle."

"I don't understand."

Marion smiled without humor. "I'd hardly expect you to. All I can say is that I was passing his room—I'd stayed up late reading—and I heard a sound inside. I opened the door and—and there he was."

"Did he tell you in what manner he'd come?"

"No. I don't think I asked. I was busy discovering—verifying—only one thing. That he *was* Arthur."

Doc Tolliver shook his head in bewilderment. "Suppose I go up and see him."

"I wish you would."

He hesitated. "Would you rather I'd go alone?"

Marion shuddered slightly. "I'd rather you'd go alone."

Doc Tolliver climbed the stairs and tapped on a door he'd entered years before to treat Arthur Garvey for pneumonia. There was no sound from within. Again Doc Tolliver knocked. Still no answer. Finally, he turned the knob and pushed the door open slowly.

What he saw as he stood in the doorway, shook him to his foundations.

There were no lights on, the room being illuminated solely by the rays of a full moon streaming in the window. The room was "bright as day," yet the moon is never a substitute for the sun and the effect was a thin eerie brilliance that set a scene of complete unreality.

But far ghostlier in effect, was the man seated before a typewriter by the window working feverishly by no other light than that of the streaming moonbeams. The mood of the setting was such that even the solid, clattering typewriter keys were reminding of the rattling of old bones.

Doc Tolliver stood rooted to the floor. Then, vaguely, he realized he was moving forward, walking on legs that did not seem to be his own, toward the specterous figure. As he drew closer the ghostly effect faded, at least so far as the figure was concerned, and

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there sat a very old man pounding the typewriter, seemingly oblivious of his surroundings.

Doc Tolliver said, "Arthur —Arthur. It is I—Doc Tolliver. Don't you recognize me?"

The man ignored him and went on with his work. Doc Tolliver came close. Nothing happened and his courage rose and he bent down. And he was convinced. Beyond all doubt, this was Arthur Garvey. Ravaged and drawn; inexplicably old; but still Arthur Garvey.

Garvey came to the end of a paragraph and looked up. "Of course I know you, Doc, but you must go away. I have a lot to write and there is very little time."

"Why is there very little time, Arthur?"

This annoyed the old man. "Any fool should be able to see that. I have taken on uncounted years. I am ill. I can die any minute. So please go away and let me work."

"Of course, Arthur, but why don't you turn on the light? It's foolish to strain your eyes in that moonlight."

"I am not straining my eyes. They are very sharp and I can see quite well. That was a phenomenon of my returning. The strengthening of my eyes. Now, will you please leave me to my work?"

"But Arthur. Marion is beside herself. Your abrupt return has shocked her. Don't you think you owe her something? At least the courtesy of answering some questions? Relieving her mind?"

Garvey spoke sharply. "Inconsequential! My obligation is to the world. That's why I must write. All questions will be answered in time. Now go! Please."

Doc Tolliver turned and walked slowly from the room. He closed the door and went down the stairs and sat beside Marion on the couch. Marion had not moved and now they sat close together, staring straight ahead into space. Marion spoke without moving her head. "Well?"

"He demanded that I leave."

"I was also ordered from the room."

"It's very strange."

"Have you any doubt as to who he is?"

"None whatever. He can be no one but Arthur."

Now Marion turned. "What are we going to do, Doc?"

Doc Tolliver sat for some time, studying the wall. "I think for the moment, we'd better do nothing at all. If we insist that he explain things,

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it will only antagonize him and we'll probably get nowhere. Let him work up there—work himself out. Then he may be in a more agreeable mood."

"How long shall we leave him alone?"

"Until tomorrow. I'll go on home and come back about noon. In the meantime, if anything happens, call me. Frankly, I think he'll probably sleep soon—from exhaustion if nothing else."

"Very well. I'll look in on him once in a while and tomorrow we'll decide what to do."

Doc Tolliver, immensely bewildered by all this, went out to his Ford and drove home. Upon arriving there, he found himself tremendously wearied, and dropped onto the bed without removing his clothing. He was asleep instantly. Fortunately, there were no demands for his services during the rest of the night and into the mid-morning hours, and Cassie Farrel, his office nurse, thinking he was on a call or resting from a late-night demand, did not bother him.

The phone finally awoke him and he opened his eyes. He glanced at the clock. It said 10:45. He picked up the phone. "Yes?"

"Doc—this is Marion. Can you come right away?"

"Of course. Is Arthur ready to talk?"

There was a pause before the answer came over the wire. "No—no, Doc. Arthur will never talk. He's dead."

"I'll be right out."

Doc Tolliver strained the Ford until its bolts groaned in getting to the big house on Cod Point. Marion was not at the door, but it was unlocked and he went in. He found her where he had left her—on the sofa in the drawing room. She looked up dully. "I'm glad you came, Doc."

"What happened?"

Marion shrugged. "He just—died. I looked in about five o'clock and he was typing furiously. I went back to my bedroom to lie down, planning to look in again in an hour. But I was exhausted and fell asleep. I awoke and dashed up immediately and he was dying. I called you. When I got back to the room, he was dead. I came down here to wait for you."

"Do you want me to go up alone?"

Marion arose and straightened her shoulders. "No. I'll go with you. I don't want to feel, later, that I refused to face it."

As they climbed the stairs,

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she seemed perturbed about something. In the upper hall she laid her hand on Doc Tolliver's shoulder and said, "You think I'm terrible in feeling the way I do—that, while he's Arthur, he really isn't—any more. It's been so long—and he's changed."

He patted her hand. "It's all right, Marion. I understand."

They went together into the room and found a tired, emaciated old man lying dead across the typewriter. They stood silently staring for a moment. Then Marion said, "Doc, there's something I didn't tell you. When I came in the first time, he was just taking his final breath. He looked at me pleadingly, and I bent over and he said something to me."

"What did he say?"

She frowned. "It was peculiar, but I'm sure I heard it correctly. He said, 'Destroy the yellow needle. Destroy.' Then he died—without finishing."

"He didn't tell you where it was?"

"No."

Doc stared down with pitying eyes. Then his attention strayed to a pile of typewritten pages lying beside the machine. He picked them up. After a moment, he pointed to the last line on the last page. It read: *Now I can die content. The story has been told. This and the diary are my contribution to humanity, warning them against the mistake I made.*

"He finished the task he set for himself," Doc Tolliver said. "I'm anxious to read this."

Marion shuddered. "Then take it. The sooner everything pertaining to this terrible thing is out of my sight, the better."

"I'll arrange everything," Doc Tolliver said, gravely. "I'll call Sam Parker and have him remove the body and arrange for the funeral."

"Thank you, Doc. I don't know what I'd do without you."

"And now, I suggest you get some sleep. Sam will handle everything. And also, he'll be discreet."

She smiled wanly. "I *am* tired, Doc."

"Then do as I say."

Marion left the room and Doc Tolliver stood looking down at what was left of Arthur Garvey. He crossed to the bed and picked up the ragged remnants of what was evidently a coat. But so faded and tattered was the garment, that he could scarcely identify it.

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In one pocket, he found a black, leather-bound book inscribed in gold letters with the word *Diary*. He put it into his own pocket and returned to the table where he picked up the typewritten sheets. Then, after a final look at the body of Arthur Garvey he went out of the room and out of the house.

Upon arrival at his own home, he phoned Sam Parker and gave him the facts of the case so far as he dared. He told Sam to pick up the body of Garvey and prepare it for cremation and assured him that he himself would sign the death certificate.

This done, he called his nurse and said he did not want to be disturbed unless it was vitally important. Then he sat down to read.

He glanced through the diary. On the fly leaf was inscribed the name—*Martin Stone*. He laid it aside, taking up the typewritten sheets. His eyes traveled swiftly over the lines:

* * *

To whom it may concern:

I know that I am soon to die and thus will not be here to defend and prove what I set down in these pages. Therefore I can only ask the reader to keep an open mind and read with sympathy. If he will do so, I believe that, in the end, he will be convinced. So, to my story:

I am a writer. If my name lives after my body is gone, it will be the result of a novel I wrote called *Dear Yesterday*. I mention this because of what the writing of the book and the research involved, did to me. Prior to that time I was little different than my contemporaries in that I lived in the present, thought in the present, and was entirely content with it. But, as locale of *Dear Yesterday*, I chose the period from 1900 to 1910; the time of voluminous skirts, high stepping bays, mustache cups, and leisurely, polite living. I felt that this was an era of American life that had contributed more to the character and solidity of the nation than any other. An era, the passing of which was a great loss. In the beginning I thought of it only objectively; the research into it and the understanding of it was merely a job to be done in order to get a book written. Nothing more.

But, as my research revealed to me the lives of the people who moved through those years—as I began to see

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and understand the period, my attitude changed. In plain words, I fell in love with turn-of-the-century America. It took on a glitter and fascination that was akin to nostalgia, and became—if I had had a choice—the only time in recorded history in which I would have chosen to live.

But a choice was not given me, and I put my love for that time into *Dear Yesterday* and as a result, the book was a best seller and made a great deal of money. I was gratified, of course, but my yearning did not diminish.

After the money from the book began rolling in, my wife, Marion, and I took a trip around the world. It was the first vacation we had ever had and we both enjoyed it very much, and as I began seeing new places and new people, I gradually forgot my attachment to the past.

It was in Cairo, Egypt, that I again became confronted with the yearning. It happened in this manner: Marion and I wandered, one afternoon, through the city, a leisurely tour without a guide; seeing what interested us and staying or moving on as we saw fit. We came upon a little street that seemed interesting, and entered it. It was not as interesting as it had first appeared, except for one startling incident. As we passed a small, open-faced booth, we heard weird, melancholy music, and saw a turbaned individual sitting cross-legged on the floor playing a strange looking pipe of some sort. We stopped to listen, along with several other tourists. While we stood there, an amazing thing happened. From a small lamp on the floor, there arose first a vapor which gradually formed into the figure of a rather scantily clad girl. I felt it was an illusion of some sort, of course, although the girl looked completely real as she smiled and walked rearward out of the booth. Still, I would have dismissed the incident or remembered it only as a curiosity, had it not been for a remark the pipe-player made. He said, "She is from the past—the far past."

Marion did not approve, and dragged me away while the remark was still registering in my mind. So, from a few doors down while she was looking in a window, I hurried back to the booth. The spectators had left, and the man was polishing the lamp, evidently for the next performance. He looked at me and smiled. I said, "It really

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was a fake, wasn't it?" at the same time taking some coins from my pocket.

He accepted the money and continued to smile. Then he said, "Yes *effendi,* it was but an illusion." He saw my obvious disappointment and added, "Merely an imaging of the reality behind—like looking into a glass."

"You mean there *is* reality behind it? That people can actually come from the past?"

His smile was my answer. His smile said yes, it was so.

"And perhaps—go back into the past?"

He said, "There is little time, now, *effendi.* If you have genuine interest, why do you not return in the evening—after darkness has come—when the city is quiet? Then we can talk undisturbed."

Marion was now on my trail and arrived to drag me away with some indignation at my deserting her. "I'll come tonight," I said in a low voice, and we went on down the street.

I knew Marion would not understand—and, oddly, I did not care whether she did or not—but I knew that wild elephants could not have kept me from returning to the little twisting street. We had supper and went to bed as usual. It seemed ages before Marion dropped off to sleep. Then I gave her another fifteen minutes before I crawled out of bed, dressed, and hurried away to my rendezvous.

He was waiting—the little mustached man with the baggy pants—and greeted me with that same enigmatic smile. "Welcome, *effendi.* I see you have returned."

"You're darn right I returned," I told him. "I want to know about this thing—this coming and going into the past. Tell me."

He regarded me silently for what seemed like a long time, then said, "Let us approach it in this manner, *effendi.* Why do you not tell me exactly where you want to go in time and space?"

"Very well. I'll be frank. I want to return to 1900."

He shrugged. "In Europe—Asia—the North Pole—"

"In America."

"In what part of America?"

"It—it doesn't matter much. If I am forced to choose—"

"You would not be able to choose, *effendi.* In fact, you would not be able to return except under very exact circumstances."

"Please tell me what they are."

"Perhaps I can explain.

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You see, one does not run, willy-nilly, about in time. There are laws governing it; complicated laws that forbid going backward into any time in which you had no previous existence."

This bewildered me. "Come again?"

He smiled. "I'll try to make it clearer. Regardless of what anyone tells you to the contrary, we have all had many existences. This is a point beyond argument among the initiated. Now in your case, you wish to go back in time to the year 1900, to the land of America. The wheels can be put in motion, but you will go only to a place you had, or rather, where you have a simultaneous existence."

"Simultaneous! That's absurd. A man cannot have two existences at once!"

He smiled and shrugged. "Then that ends the matter. Good evening, *effendi.*"

He was terminating the interview and I felt a touch of panic. I said, "Please forgive me. I was wrong. A man can be in seven places at once if you say so. Just so long as you can do what I ask."

"I may be able to or I may not. That depends on previous fixed patterns. I can send you back to the America of 1900, but it will be a little like leaping across a chasm into a fog. If, at that time, you have a simultaneous functioning existence, you will go to it and join it unerringly, and you will change because you will be adding a later one."

"And if I had none?"

Again the characteristic shrug. "The consequences of the error must be suffered." He stared at me analytically. "*Effendi,* there are many things in heaven and earth as was so aptly put by a certain English dramatist. Many that we cannot understand we charge away as superstition or the hallucinations experienced by unbalanced minds. For instance, who takes seriously the tales told of unanchored spirits riding the wind? Of places where agonized specters make the night hideous with their laments?"

"You mean that—?"

"If you find no simultaneous existence to take you in, you will not find the alternative solace of oblivion. You will have crossed the void and there is no way to return save from the impetus found in the solid matter of a simultaneous existence. You too will roam the wind."

In my eagerness I was willing to brave all dangers and his mouthings seemed so

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much gibberish—the warnings of a timid soul. "Who on earth would ever want to return?"

He continued to smile, seemingly wishing to taunt me. "There are so many risks, *effendi*. For instance, you might arrive at your destination to go fresh into a grave. Suppose your simultaneous existence were at the point of death when you arrived?"

"The chances of that are slim."

He nodded agreement. "You still wish to go?"

"Of course."

"When?"

"Now, man! Now!"

"Very well." He motioned for me to follow him and we went through a doorway. In the backroom, he turned. "You are willing to leave your wife?"

It seemed to me a matter of little consequence. "Of course I'm willing."

"You wish to leave her no message?"

"She'll get along all right. I'm leaving her something she will value far more—money."

He was holding in his hand a small object that could best be described as a needle with blunted ends. It was yellow, probably gold, I thought, and I wondered about its significance. He enlightened me quickly.

"This," he said, "is very important. Through a process I will not take the time to explain, this ah—" he smiled, "shall we call it a transitor? —will be embedded in your body." He touched me. "Just there. It is very important that you remember it and remove it as soon as you arrive at your destination. Then the cord will be broken and you will find peace." He stopped and smiled and shrugged. "That is—if there is peace to be found in the time and place you yearn for."

"I am ready," I said, and there was within me a feeling of keen anticipation; as would be found in a traveler, long in foreign lands, going at last, home.

*

I awoke in a huge, old-fashioned four poster bed, I felt fresh and rested, and there was, within me a sense of contentment, of well-being, and sheer love of life that was almost an intoxication. It was spring. There was a huge tree outside the open window of my bedroom and the singing of the birds was like a symphony. I stretched and yawned and came wide

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awake, but I was in no hurry to get out of bed. Instead, I lay there counting my blessings. I thought: You are Martin Stone. You are twenty-six years old; the successful editor of the *Clayton City Bugle*, the paper your father built into a success and left you when he died. You've built it up and made a better paper out of it. Next week you will marry Deborah Leland, just about the prettiest, most desirable girl in town. But, above all, you are young, healthy and full to the brim with life. You and Deborah will raise a family. They will go to school and grow up and marry and have children themselves, and their futures will be as sure and solid and foreordained as yours has been. They will live in an ordered world with nothing ahead of them but an expanding, brightening future. You are a lucky man, Martin.

Then, I frowned. This was a bit puzzling. Why should my mind suddenly occupy itself with such abstractions? And get such satisfaction out of them? I had never been a philosophical man. Prior to this moment, I had never looked more than a week ahead in my life. Then why this sudden thankfulness for an ordered life and an ordered world? It was nothing exceptional. Everyone had it.

Then I remembered the dream. Dream, or nightmare? It had been devilishly clear. I had lived—in this dream—in some fantastic world where there were so many fabulous inventions that I was stunned, even here in the wakefulness of reality. I had crossed an ocean with my wife—imagine that!—in a TWA Stratoliner—a machine that flew through the air. I was a writer and had made a great deal of money from a book called *Dear Yesterday*. This "wife" and I had been walking in a Turkish bazaar and a curious little man had told me to do something—to remove something. I tried to remember what it was. Then I laughed aloud. It was so utterly silly. Remove what? The ridiculousness of the whole thing hit me and I got out of bed and began dressing.

Martha had breakfast ready when I got downstairs. I chucked her under the chin and said, "And how will it feel, Martha, to have a mistress in the house again?"

She folded her arms and said, "I think it will be a fine thing when you marry Miss Deborah. She's a fine girl and

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it's time you settled down and began raising a family."

I agreed with her.

After breakfast, I went out into the bright sunshine and found that old Jerry had the span ready and waiting. He had washed the buggy the previous day, and it glistened in the sun. He looked a bit worried and as I approached, he said, "Morning Mr. Stone. I'm a bit worried about Dan's foot. That place we took the felon off ain't healing so well."

I lifted the right rear hoof of the near bay for inspection. To lose one of a perfectly matched pair of bays would have been tragic. But I thought Jerry was overestimating the danger of complications. I told him so and got into the buggy and drove to the barber shop.

Max Steiner saw me getting out of the buggy and had my mug down from its niche when I entered the shop. I sat down in the chair and he lathered my face.

As I lay back, I said, "There is something I have to remove."

Max paused with his razor in mid-air. "What did you say? Mr. Stone?"

"Say—oh, nothing. Nothing at all. No, nothing at all..."

There is little more that I can write of this phase. My memory of it grows abruptly dim, like a man slipping over the edge of a precipice into oblivion. I have a faint recollection of Deborah. Her beauty and freshness. And later, her terror and agony. I remember nothing else.

So, in order that the continuity of this recital be not broken, I beg that you cease reading from this typewritten narrative for the time being, and refer to the diary of Martin Stone. Read the tragic book to its end, then come back again to the last few bits of information I here set down.

Do me, I beg of you, this favor.

*

Doc Tolliver checked and found there was a page and a half more of typewritten copy. He was tempted to read on to the end. But he checked himself, laid it dutifully aside, and picked up the black, leatherbound book. It was obviously quite old and had been written in a masculine hand. He thumbed through the pages and discovered that the writing—while remaining in the same hand—changed at various times from slow lei-

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surely script to words that seemed to race across the page. The varying emotions of the writer as revealed by characters put on paper.

The first entry was dated:

SEPTEMBER 9TH 1902

I surprise myself by this action which I have undertaken—the keeping of a diary. Up to this time, such a thing would have never occurred to me. But such a change has come over me in the last two years, that I feel like a man alone—isolated among people who have no form or substance. There is no one to talk to, no one who understands, and I am very lonely. Perhaps I will derive some comfort from this book—this manner of talking to myself. Perhaps, in putting the days on record and going back over them, I will find the clue as to when and where this madness of mine began. Is it madness, really? I wish I knew.

SEPTEMBER 15, 1902

I have been sitting here, going back over my past life and it seems to me that there was a day, some two years ago, when I hit the high point of happiness. Possibly not a day; perhaps a period of time, but certainly not more than a month. It was, as I recall, a little like moving up a hill—higher and higher, into atmosphere ever more rarefied and exhilarating. Then, it was as though the summit of the hill had been reached and the swift descent begun.

That was certainly the time my restlessness began; when quite suddenly, the world I lived in did not seem adequate. It impressed me as a play world; a place where the actors were sitting around waiting for the real drama to begin.

I remember that I looked at my team of fine bays one day; at my shining carriage; and the thought came to me in stark clarity: *This is a silly, antiquated manner of traveling.* I looked down the road and expected to see something—God knows what—some form of vehicle, I think—traveling toward me very swiftly. But what form of vehicle? The result was a stark sense of frustration such as I had never before known.

There was another incident that puzzled me. I got into the buggy and, instead of reaching for the reins, I pushed over to the left side of the

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seat and began clawing at the dashboard. That is the only way to explain it—clawing as though I expected to find something there, what, I don't know. But it seemed that the buggy was but the skeleton of something else. What? Perhaps the vehicle I had expected to see coming down the road. What did it all mean? Am I going crazy?

I hear Deborah returning. She spent the evening with friends. She does not know I am keeping a diary. She only knows something is terribly wrong. So I must close now because I want her to find me in bed.

SEPTEMBER 21, 1902

My ears are still red from the embarrassment of this day. The embarrassment and the fear of what is happening to me. What is this insanity I appear to have no control over? Today's exhibition of it occurred when I went to the barber shop. Max saw me coming as usual. He had my mug down and was mixing the lather as I entered. I stepped through the door and stopped suddenly, completely disgusted with the scene before me. The thought in my mind was clear: *What a sloppy, time-consuming way of keeping a clean-shaven face. Coming here each morning to be smeared with soap and scraped with a piece of steel. There is certainly an easier way.*

Max said, "Sit right down, Mr. Stone," and I did as he directed. Then, after he had finished and was trimming my mustache, I spoke without thought, almost as though the words were not my own: "Shave that thing off, Max."

He could not believe what he had heard. "What was that, Mr. Stone?"

"I said—shave that thing off."

"Your — your *mustache?*"

"What else?"

"But Mr. Stone. That would be unthinkable!"

"Why?"

"Why? Because—well, nobody shaves off his mustache!"

I realized he was right. Also that he was looking at me peculiarly. I brushed it over as best I could. I smiled and said, "That was a joke, Max. I wanted to see how you'd react."

He smiled back, but weakly, and I was glad to finish up and get out of the place. I could feel his puzzled eyes upon me as I left.

But that was not the end

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of it. As I was about to get into the buggy, I saw Leo Tench turn the corner and unlock the door of his hardware store preparing for another day's business. I stood there watching him.

Then, as he disappeared inside, I turned and followed him, reaching him just as he was putting on his alpaca jacket. He said, "Good morning, Mr. Stone. What can I do for you?"

"I want an electric razor," I said.

He paused in mid-motion, then slowly went on with the task of getting into the coat. "What was that you wanted?"

His stupidity annoyed me. Anyone should have known what I was talking about. "I said I want to buy an electric razor. I'm getting tired of going to the barber shop every morning and wasting so much time getting shaved."

He was amazed. He said, "But Mr. Stone—where else would anyone go to get shaved? Everybody goes to the barber shop every morning. It's the only way to get it done."

"That's foolish," I snapped. "Will you sell me an electric razor, or won't you?"

He came closer and peered into my face. "Mr. Stone, tell me—exactly what is an electric razor?"

"Why it's—it's—" I felt like seven kinds of a fool. I wondered what had brought on this insane outburst. This coming into a store and heatedly demanding an article that did not exist.

Leo Tench was still peering into my face. "Do you feel all right, Mr. Stone?"

"I'm quite all right," I mumbled, and rushed from the store. I left the buggy where it was and hurried to my office. I went in and locked the door after me and sat down behind my desk. I was weak and shaken.

But I found no answers. Only a great bewilderment.

OCTOBER 10, 1902

Deborah is terribly worried about me. A great gap has opened between us which we both try to bridge but it seems a hopeless task. I have tried to analyze my feeling toward her, but, as usual, I arrive only at greater questions and unanswerable riddles. For instance:

We have been married now for two years. In that length of time, the intimacy between a husband and wife should certainly have passed

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the stage of embarrassment. And, for Deborah, it most certainly has. While not an immodest woman, she makes no effort to hide herself from me during intimate moments —at times when we are in our bedroom together preparing for bed or arising. In fact, lately, her eagerness to intrude herself upon me physically is a little pathetic. She feels, as a wife, she has a right to do this; even a duty.

But, in my case, when I enter the bedroom it is with a great sense of guilt, as though I were entering the bedroom of some other man's wife. A stiffness and formality comes over me that I can neither explain nor conquer. If I come upon her even in her camisole, I blush and feel a great urge to rush out of the room. And the thought is clearly in my mind: *This is not my wife. This is a woman I am living with but whom I have no right to touch.* At times, I have an urge to rush out and consult a doctor; to tell him I am mentally ill and to ask treatment. Then the foolishness of such an attitude strikes me. To whom would I go? What would a doctor know about this thing that afflicts me. Nothing. A man is either sane or insane. If he is sane, he walks the streets. If he is not, they put him away. This is as it should be, of course, but somehow, it does not seem right.

Poor Deborah! She does everything possible to bridge the gap between us. I wish I could help her more.

DECEMBER 11, 1902

I have the feeling I am not alone. This has come over me gradually until now, it is an obsession. It began some weeks ago when I walked home from the office. I worked late that night and had not used the buggy, feeling I needed the exercise. As I came to the corner to walk the final half block, I stopped suddenly and whirled around. I was as certain someone was close behind me. But the street was deserted. Is this some sort of a persecution complex that I am developing?

DECEMBER 15, 1902

I think all my troubles are solved! Today I feel like a new man. Deborah told me we are going to have a baby! Immediately, the gap between us seemed to vanish. I took her in my arms and kissed her; and I think, at that mo-

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ment we were closer than we had ever been. Deborah said, "Martin, darling. I've wanted so much to make you a good wife. I want to make you happy, and I feel, somehow, that I've failed. Please tell me what I've been doing wrong."

A feeling of guilt flooded through me. I could find no words. But I kissed her again the way a husband should kiss his wife; and I knew the feeling I'd had—of Deborah not really being mine—had been some weird hallucination that was gone forever. And while I did not speak, I made her realize, too, that it would never come again.

I spent the rest of the day in the clouds. It will be a boy, of course. The rest of my life will be dedicated to making Deborah happy and raising my son into a fine man.

JANUARY 6, 1903

Last night, I had a dream. It was so vivid, so horrible, that each detail is clear in my mind; far clearer than the memory of any dream should be. I was in a long, narrow room sitting on a bench, clad in strange, heavy clothing with a huge pack on my back. There was a scowling man standing nearby staring at a watch he had on his wrist. Then he went over and opened a door and there was the sound of rushing wind. I knew, somehow, that this room I sat in was high in space, traveling at a great speed. The man motioned me toward the door. I got up and went to him. He put a ring of some sort in my hand and said, "Zero!" and pushed me and I plunged down into darkness.

Then a very strange thing happened. There was a terrific wrenching as though I'd been jerked sharply from above, and I thought the man had relented and was pulling me back into the room. But I continued to descend into darkness, though slowly now, floating gently down until I hit the ground hard enough to knock the breath out of me. I was unhurt, however, and as I got to my feet, a bright light flashed on me, illuminating the whole area, and there was a circle of scowling men around me. They too were dressed in the odd, bulky clothes and they carried ugly, short-snouted instruments which were obviously weapons of some sort.

One of them came close and I asked, "Where am I?"

The man said, "In Russia, of course."

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That seemed incredible to me. Russia, the land of the Czars. "But how did I get here?"

"You are a spy of the capitalistic war mongers! You were parachuted in."

This bewildered me. Parachuted? Spy? Capitalistic warmongers? I felt like a fugitive from *Alice In Wonderland* and expected the Mad Hatter to come dancing in at any moment. But the mood here was grim and cold. The man suddenly wielded the weapon in his hands—butt first, slamming it against the side of my head, cutting my cheek open to the bone. I fell to the ground. Immediately, two of the uniformed men stepped forward and lifted me by the shoulders and dragged me across the ground.

I was dazed and in pain and the pain seemed far more real than is usually associated with a dream. Here my consciousness faded and I remember nothing more until I found myself seated in a chair with a strong light in my eyes. Oddly, the gash in my cheek was healed, but there was great pain all over my body. The light blinded me and I could see no one, but I knew there was a circle of men standing around me. They began asking questions in voices that were sharp and hostile.

"Where did you come from?"

"America."

"You lie!"

"I am an American citizen."

"You are a spy!"

"I don't understand. Why should an American want to spy on Russia?"

"You are not a citizen of America at all. You are a spy of Hitler, the German animal!"

"Hitler? Who is he?"

I was slapped across the mouth. "We will ask the questions."

But the scene faded and I was suddenly in another place; one horrible beyond description, where long lines of thin, tortured, emaciated people were being driven into a grim looking building. Their tormentors were obviously soldiers. Soldiers armed with clubs and whips and the scene was one of indescribable brutality. But it paled in comparison to the interior of the building. There, I saw screaming men strapped to operating tables. And I saw dead bodies thrown callously into furnaces.

This scene faded also, and I was in a huge, formless place with nothing near me

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but a vague, indistinct form, black and menacing. It did not look human, but words came and I knew it had a voice. "This is the world into which your son will grow."

The dream ended here. I awakened, sweat-drenched, nauseous, trembling. From what dark place in my brain had this horror sprung?

I was afraid.

FEBRUARY 17, 1903

Today, Doctor Barnhart came to see Deborah. He was just coming down the stairs as I arrived home. I hadn't known he was coming and was naturally upset. I asked, "Is anything wrong, Doctor? Why wasn't I notified."

His expression was grave. He said, "No, Martin. Debby is fine. This was merely a routine visit."

"I'm glad of that," I said. "But of course, Deborah is a strong, healthy girl. Everything is sure to go smoothly."

"With Debby—yes. But I'd like to have a little talk with you, Martin."

"With me? Why I'm fine, Doctor. Never felt better in my life."

"Let's step into the library."

We went in and sat down and Doctor Barnhart said, "I'm worried about you, Martin. The way you've been acting. What is it, son? What have you got on your mind?"

"Why, nothing. Not a thing."

"I'm trying to help you and I think you should be more frank with me. I promise that nothing you say will go beyond me."

"I tell you I'm quite all right! I wish you'd stop prying."

"Then possibly you don't remember certain incidents—"

"What incidents?"

"Well, I might mention the one in Adrian Carey's grocery store last week when you held forth on the unsanitary manner in which he handled food."

"I remember it very well, but does that indicate there is anything wrong with me?"

"I think so. You said crackers sold from a barrel should bring the health department down on him. You stated it was criminal to sell cheese and such things without first wrapping them in cellophane."

"Cellophane? What on earth is that?"

"I thought perhaps you could tell me."

I tried to hide the degree

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to which his words had shaken me. I know that several times lately, I have criticized the ways of local tradesmen. This in itself is probably not serious, but the strange terms I use, such as *cellophane;* words I forget completely a few minutes after using them. What is *cellophane?* Obviously a creation of my own mind. In short, nothing at all. In my heart, I feared Doctor Barnhart was right. I did need help of some sort. But, in my fear and desperation, I refused to admit it. That, I told myself, was all over; my fear of going mad. I had faced it before, but it had all vanished with the knowledge that I am going to be a father.

"And your statement in the barbershop the other day that in fifty years a bomb will be invented that will wipe out an entire city in the flash of an eye."

"Did—did I say that?"

"You certainly did."

"All right then, Doctor. What's wrong with me? What do you suggest I do?"

"I think you need a rest, Martin. I think you have been overworking yourself. You will no doubt straighten out all right after a little time away from business worries —from the tensions of everyday life."

Something flared up inside me. "Business worries! Tensions! But good lord, man, this is a period in our history that will be remembered for calmness and serenity. Our way of life is leisurely, unhurried. The horse and buggy age! How would you like to live in a world where whole cities can be wiped out instantly? Where people stand twenty four hours a day watching the sky for fleets of bombers that may come over the horizon at any moment? Where a plane loaded with bombs could leave Moscow and be over New York in six hours? In a world where one bomb destroyed the city of Hiroshima in a single flash?"

The words poured from me like water from a fountain, and as I spoke, a wave of pure terror came over me; not from the import of what I was saying; that I scarcely heard, much less understood. But I felt as though I was in the grip of a force that was crying out some great indignation and would not be silenced.

I staggered and Doctor Barnhart helped me into a chair. I think I went unconscious for a few moments, because my next knowledge

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was of a cold cloth on my head and the Doctor looking at me anxiously. "Are you all right, Martin?" he asked.

My strength was coming back. "Yes. I'm all right. What—what happened?"

"You talked," he said. Then. "Let's see if we can get at this thing while it's fresh. Tell me—do you remember what you said?"

"I—I think so."

"Then what is this business about a plane leaving Moscow and going to New York in six hours?"

"A—a plane?"

"That's what you said."

"But I don't know what a plane is."

"Neither do I. And this bomb destroying Hiroshima?"

"That's absurd."

"Where is Hiroshima?"

"It's a town in Japan, isn't it?"

"I think you're right. Now, who dropped this bomb?"

"I don't know. Isn't this a little ridiculous? We're talking about hallucinations as though they were facts."

"Then you grant that you haven't been acting normally?"

I realized I had fallen into his trap. A feeling of discouragement took command. What was the use of evading the issue? I said, "Doctor, what's happening to me? Am I mad? Have I gone insane?"

"Of course not."

"But I can't go on this way. I—"

His hand tightened on my arm, his face turned stern. "Now let's not have any of that. You're neither a quitter nor a weakling. You have too much at stake to let this thing whip you. There is Deborah and the child she will bear you."

"Don't you think I know that?"

"A little courage is the answer. You'd be surprised how much a strong man can take. A human being is not a fragile toy that collapses in a slight breeze."

"This thing that has a hold on me is hardly a breeze, Doctor—"

"Let's dig into it, you and I. Let's see if we can't bring it out into the open."

And before long I was pouring out my mind to him, telling him of the terrible restlessness that was like a physical sickness eating at my stomach.

"Can you be a little more specific? What form does it take? Are you bored with your work? Do you feel an urge to—say, book passage on a steamer and travel to faraway places?"

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"No. Those things have nothing to do with it. It's something almost unexplainable."

"Try to explain, anyhow."

"Well, it's as if I am living behind a curtain; as though, just beyond range of my vision — my senses — great and important things are happening; as though they have put me in a dark closet where I'm not permitted to be a part of a fabulous, glittering world — of earth-shaking events that I want to know about but am not allowed to. Once I got a clear mental flash of a war so vast that all the nations of the earth are involved—"

Doctor Barnhart held up a quick finger. "Now wait. Let's scotch this thing by proving what it is—an absolute hallucination. Let's tear it to pieces with cold logic."

"I wish you would."

"That point about a war in which all the nations of the earth are involved. Can't you see the ridiculousness of it? Such a thing would be impossible. Where would such a war be fought? Wars, my boy, spring from differences between nations—usually two nations—but let's go so far as to say three or even four could be involved in a dispute. Wouldn't that be the practicable limit of any point of argument?"

"I don't quite understand."

"I mean this: What serious difference can you think of that could possibly arise between—say, Italy and Japan, to name two at random.

"These two are on opposite sides of a vast earth. Their thoughts and interests do not conflict. It would be impossible for them to find a battleground. But let's say, for argument's sake, they did get into a war. By what possible logic could you bring all the other nations of the earth into it? Aside from political impossibility, there is also the physical impossibility of such a war. How could the necessary, vast manpower be moved about? How could such a war be fought? From a military standpoint, it's impossible."

"Your logic is certainly sound."

"Of course. I'm of the opinion that the Napoleonic Wars reached the absolute limit of size relative to such things. And that was a freak war. There will never again exist an egomaniac genius of his type. The laws of chance forbid it."

"Stalin?"

"What did you say?"

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"Ah—I'm not sure. Some single word."

"I think it was 'Stalin,'" Doctor Barnhart said. "What does it mean? Is it the name of a person?"

I shook my head in bewilderment. "I haven't the least idea. I wouldn't have known what the word was if you hadn't caught and remembered it. Stalin may be the name of a horse for all I know. Or it may mean nothing at all."

Doctor Barnhart rubbed his hands together briskly. "I think we'll get you straightened out all right, Martin. While the case certainly has interesting facets, I'm sure it's not serious. Frankly, I think it amounts to overwork —as I said—and an extremely vivid imagination."

Doctor Barnhart took his leave then, and I sat for a while, mulling over what had taken place. A load had certainly been lifted from my mind and I was glad I'd confided in him. A solid, down-to-earth approach was what had been needed all the while. The vacation idea wasn't bad at all. After the baby was born, and old enough to travel, I told myself, the three of us would take a long, long trip. We would travel far and come home when we chose to.

JULY 7, 1903

I am afraid Doctor Barnhart and I are friends no longer. This is tragic for me, because he alone has been instrumental in returning me to some semblance of normalcy. His keen logic and never-tiring patience has held this thing within me at bay.

The breach occurred yesterday. Doctor Barnhart sent word to my office around ten o'clock, that Deborah was in labor. I of course hurried home. And during the fifteen-minute trip, a terrible fear entered my mind. A fear for her safety. Such a thing is natural, I suppose, to an expectant father, but I don't think the actual terror I felt could be termed natural at all.

Anyhow, when I reached home, I was as tense as a bow string, and as I rushed into the home, one of those strange spells came over me. Doctor Barnhart was just coming down the stairs. His jacket was off and he was rolling up his sleeves. He smiled at me and said, "I want you to go into the library and stay there until your child is born. I can't have you under foot."

"Is Deborah still here?"

"Still here? Of course she is."

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"You mean you haven't taken her away yet?"

"Where on earth would I take her? She's going to have a baby, man"

My anger flared like a nova. "That's what I mean, you fool! Why haven't you gotten her to the hospital? Do you want the baby born in a cab on the way?"

Doctor Barnhart's jaw dropped. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"About protecting Deborah's life! Who ever heard of a woman having a baby in her own bedroom. That sort of thing went out in 1900! Get her to a hospital, you quack! Where they have oxygen tents and the facilities for blood transfusions and sterile delivery rooms!"

Doctor Barnhart's eyes flashed. "You've really gone out of your mind, Martin! I'm not aware of any great changes in medical practice since 1900. Let's see—that was about three years ago—"

I was stunned. "Three years—" I knew the reason for Doctor Barnhart's hostility. I'd called him a quack. Regardless of his objectivity relative to my case, he was sensitive where his own integrity was concerned. "Three years—" I repeated, dully.

"If it weren't for my loyalty to Deborah," he snapped. "I'd leave this house instantly. As it is, I must deliver that baby. And I suggest that you stay out of my way!"

JULY 8, 1903

I am the father of an eight pound girl. Deborah is doing well.

JULY 12, 1903

The dreams are coming back. The horrible nightmare. Last night I stood somewhere in a dream world and saw a vast island blown completely out of existence in one great blinding blast. This horror was so realistic that after I came awake, I lay blinded as from the sun's glare. Why do these terrible dreams haunt me?

JULY 21, 1903

Doctor Barnhart has not deserted me! He came to my office today and actually apologized for having become insulted! I told him he had every right to be insulted. Then he sat down and began asking me questions. "Martin—some of those things you

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said. I can't get them out of my mind. For instance, do you recall demanding that Deborah go to a hospital so she would have facilities for a blood transfusion?"

It was very embarrassing to have to say that I did not. "I recall the incident, of course, but none of the details. What on earth would I know about blood transfusions?"

"It is a process of transferring blood from the body of one human to that of another."

"Why on earth would anyone want to do that?"

"New blood is definitely helpful when a patient has not the resistance to fight off a disease or sickness—that is, in some cases. But it is a very touchy operation."

"It seems to me," I said, "that when I spoke of it, I had a vision of the blood being taken from bottles and that it was a very common practice."

Doctor Barnhart seemed a trifle weary. "I have been doing a great deal of thinking in the last few days. I have been taking each hallucination you had—I now use the word advisedly—and trying to charge them off as impossibilities. But in all cases, I can not do this. It is my personal conviction, for instance, that all expectant mothers should deliver in hospitals. I think it is the opinion of the whole medical profession. So who am I to say that it will not some day come to pass?"

"Are you trying to say, Doctor, that you think I am having visions of the future instead of insane nightmares?"

"I don't know what to say."

"I don't know whether I draw new hope or increased fear from what you've told me. I only wonder—how long can I go on?"

He looked up sharply. "Martin, I want you to stop thinking along the lines of hopelessness and despair. You and I are going against this thing with renewed vigor. We will find the solution. I promise you we will."

"I'm grateful for your help, Doctor. I don't know what I would do without it."

He arose and we shook hands and after he left I again felt the same surge of hope our first interview had given me. I will not be beaten by this thing!

AUGUST 7, 1905

Today, while rummaging through some private papers,

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I came upon this book, and felt the urge to make a final entry. I leafed through it and reread the record of that weird spell I had months ago. Memories of the mental agony I went through, make me doubly grateful to Doctor Barnhart. I'm sure I owe him my sanity. He stayed with me so patiently, worked so doggedly, and while we never found any answers or definitions, we conquered it together. I wonder at times, what it was. Not too often, though. It is better that it be blotted from my mind. Was it sort of brain sickness? I'll never know.

*

Doc Tolliver leaned back and rubbed his eyes. The fine, faded script had not been easy to read. At that moment, the phone rang. Frowning, he picked it up. "Yes?"

"Doc, this is Sam Parker."

"What's on your mind, Sam?"

"Something kind of funny. Don't like to tell you over the phone. Something I found on Garvey's body. I'd like to show it to you."

"All right. Where will you be?"

"I've got to run out to the Garvey place—"

"I'll meet you there in half an hour."

"Fine. Good-bye, Doc."

Doc Tolliver took up the diary again and read the entry at the bottom of the page he had not finished. The date startled him. The entry was very short.

DECEMBER 24—1908

Doctor Barnhart died one month ago today. I need him. I think the horror is returning. What will happen to me?

*

Doc Tolliver turned the page, then riffled through the remaining pages of the diary. There were no further entries.

He laid the book down and took up the remaining typewritten sheet. There was not a great deal of copy left to be read. Almost a postscript:

*

There were strange phenomena involved in my transition from the present to the past and back again. One of them is that I can remember Martin Stone to a great extent, but he obviously had no recollection of me. That, I

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suppose is natural because how can one remember a person who does not yet exist in the scheme of existence as the human mind conceives it? Another is that one can go backward without changing, but on the return trip, however swift, the years register. Thus, a man can age fifty years in an instant—or is it an instant?

Frankly, I believe our conception of past and present and future is all wrong. I do not think there is any past. I think the past and the present are inseparably woven into one. I believe that, right now, this instant, Martin Stone is still living his tortured, bewildered life—the life I condemned him to lead through my lapse of memory. I was told to remove the yellow needle but I forgot it completely. Even now I do not know where it is. Soon I will die. Am I condemned to more torture because I cannot find it?

That is my own misfortune, but for you, there is a lesson to be learned from my tragic mistakes. The lesson is this: Each man is born into his own time. There is obviously a reason for this in the majestic scheme of things as the Creator willed them to be. Realize this, and be content. There is no place in creation where a man can run and hide from his destiny. There is no safe, snug era where life was good and the world was a better place to live in; no era that did not deserve to vanish into the dusty archives of time and history. Each era has its compensations and if, today, we live in fear of annihilation, in continued dread of tomorrow, I say that we are still better off than those who lived in any preceding time. I longed for the peace and quiet and safety of a bygone era. In truth, I found it dull, stupid, and boring.

So let me say that you who live now are the most fortunate people who ever lived on the face of this earth. There is not one human being who was fated to live and die before you who would not envy you if he could know the world of wonders in which you are privileged to live and he was not.

So be content! Realize how fortunate you are—you—God's most enriched and favored children.

*

That was the end of it. Doc Tolliver got up from his chair and stood for a few moments, deeply moved. Then he folded

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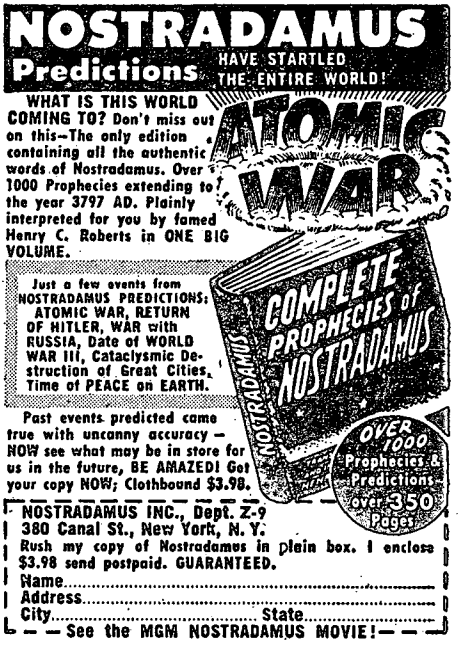
the papers and put them in his desk.

But something troubled him; an unanswered question; a facet of this puzzle yet unsolved. After pondering it at length, he moved with sudden decision, and soon the Ford was creaking along Ocean Road toward the Garvey mansion.

He found Marion in the library, huddled before the open fire and a shawl drawn close around her shoulders. "Hello, Doc."

He put a hand on her shoulder. "Are you feeling better now?"

She smiled wanly. "A little."



"Marion—the research Arthur did before he wrote *Dear Yesterday*. There must be some data around—some notes."

"They are in the attic. In two green file cabinets. I moved them up there after—"

"I wonder if I could look through them?"

"Of course. I'll show you—"

"That won't be necessary. I can find them."

He went into the attic and began going through the two squat cabinets he found in one corner. The first did not yield what he wanted. But the second one contained a folder in which—among other things—he found a yellowed clipping from a newspaper. The name of the paper was not in evidence, but the date had been written across the clipping in pencil: *January 7, 1909*. The headline read: *Publisher committs suicide*. And in smaller type, the subhead: *Martin Stone takes own life in fit of despondency*.

Doc Tolliver did not read the body of the clipping. He did not need to. He had the information he wanted. The missing link. Now the picture was complete. He put the

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folder back into the file cabinet and went downstairs.

The undertaker was waiting for him. Doc Tolliver said, "You had something for me?"

"Yeah, Doc. This. I thought it was kind of funny. There was a litle lump behind Art's —behind the right ear and I got curious and pulled this yellow needle out. Looked like it had been there a long time. Can't figure how he lived so long with that in his brain."

Doc Tolliver took the yellow needle. He said, "Well, I guess it doesn't matter much one way or the other, now, does it?"

The undertaker looked at him. There was a pause. Then, "I guess not, Doc—if you say so."

"Thanks — thanks very much."

The undertaker left.

Doc Tolliver studied the needle for a long time. It looked harmless, he thought; this little yellow bar of metal that had doomed two men to lives of torture. He left the house and went out rummaged around under the seat of his car.

A few minutes later, he could be seen walking out on the cliff toward the ocean. At the sheer edge of the cliff, he stood for a moment looking down into the sea below. Then he looked at the object in his hand. It was a rock, with the yellow needle held securely to it by many loopings of fine wire.

Then Doc Tolliver braced himself and threw the rock as far as he could out into the sea.

Out where, he hoped, the souls of Arthur Garvey and Martin Stone might finally have found rest. **THE END**

PRACTICAL VIEWPOINT

The late Damon Runyon has been credited with this modernization of an old bit of wisdom: The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong—but that's the way to bet.

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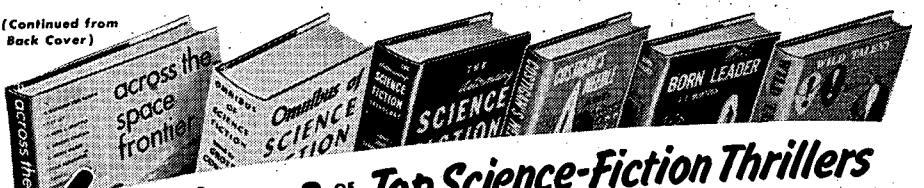

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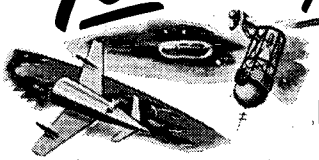

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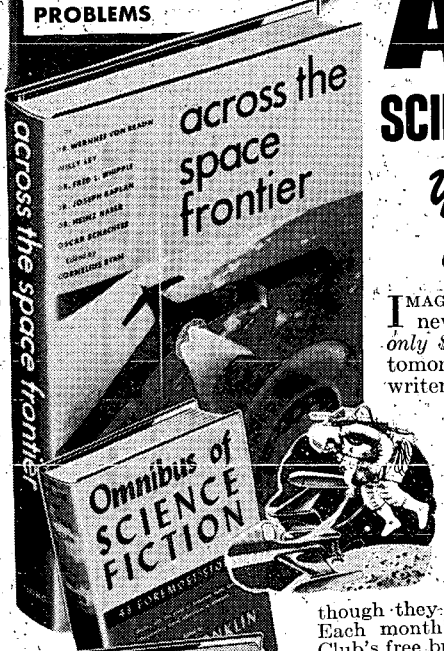

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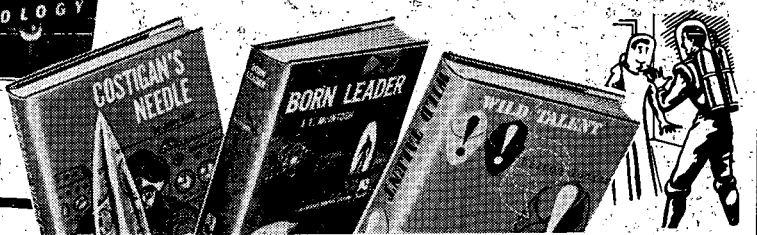

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